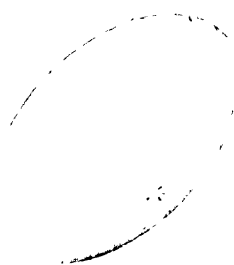


JACK LINDSAY'S new novel is a large-scale picture of post-war England. Throughout, the emphasis is on people: a young girl in London, a demobilized soldier wondering whether to return to the Lancashire coal-mines, a Bradford mill-owner's son, a Tyneside trades union official—these are the main characters, vividly described against the background and time in which they live. It is a story of individual struggle and development, rich with the tumult of life and the varied backgrounds of Tyneside engineering, Yorkshire textile mills, Lancashire coal-mining, and the London of the Docks.

This is undoubtedly Jack Lindsay's finest contemporary novel.



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Betrayed Spring

A NOVEL OF THE BRITISH WAY

by

JACK LINDSAY

LONDON
THE BODLEY HEAD

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To
LOUIS ARAGON *and* EMILE BURNS
gratefully

Albion cold lays on his Rock: storms and snows beat round him,
Beneath the Furnaces and the starry Wheels and the Immortal Tomb:
Howling winds cover him: roaring seas dash furious against him:
In the deep darkness broad lightnings glare, long thunders roll.

The weeds of Death inwrap his hands and feet, blown incessant
And wash'd incessant by the forever restless sea-waves foaming abroad
Upon the white Rock. England, a Female Shadow, as deadly damps
Of the Mines of Cornwall and Derbyshire, lays upon his bosom heavy,
Moved by the wind in columns of thick cloud, returning, folding
round

His loins and bosom, unremovable by swelling storm and loud
rending

Of enraged thunders. Around the Starry Wheels of their Giant Sons
Revolve, and over them the Furnaces of Los, and the Immortal Tomb
around,

Etern sitting in the Tomb to watch them unceasing night and day:
And the body of Albion was closed apart from all Nations. . . .

Where are the Kingdoms of the World and all their glory that grew
on Desolation,

The Fruit of Albion's Poverty Tree, when the Triple Headed Gog-
Magog Giant

Of Albion Taxed the Nation into Desolation and then gave the
Spectrous Oath?

Such is the Cry from all the Earth.

—William Blake: JERUSALEM

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THE FOUR FAMILIES
and some of their friends

I *London*

Will Tremaine, plasterer, and Amy his wife (sister of Jim Emery of
Tyneside)
Phyl, their daughter.
Herb, their son.
Nell, their married daughter
Matt Lee, Nell's husband, docker.
Bette Jones, Kath Kaplan, Maudie Parrot, Pearlle Rugsby, friends of Phyl.
Jeff Burrows, docker.
Harry Manson, L. S.E. student.

II *Lancashire*

Daniel Baxter, pit checkweighman, and Mary his wife.
Dick, their son
Alice, their daughter
Patricia Hemans, typist.
Joseph Sidebotham, clerk engaged to Alice
Joan Wirtock, cotton-worker
Mike Beevers, miner.
Mrs Fitton, Joan's aunt
Henderson, mine manager

III *Yorkshire*

John Swinton, mill-owner, and Amelia his wife
Kit, their son.
Joyce, Margaret, and Diana, their daughters.
Jane Dacres, daughter of a mill-owner
Valerie Fletcher, friend of Joyce.
Sid Wotton, textile designer.
Jill Wethers and Dan Turner, weavers.
Colin Harker and Brian Bowers, student friends of Kit.

IV *Tyneside*

William Emery, A.E.U. official, and Jean his wife.

Barbara Pickering, typist.

Clayton, owner of a small engineering works.

Jack Benson, engineer.

Annie Royce, a young girl.

Period: September 1946–March 1947

NOTE

I SHOULD like to thank the following for aid in the many explorations needed for this work (though the final picture is my sole responsibility). Barbara Adams, E. V. Tempest, Dorothy and Reg Birch, T. M. Mosley, M. Agnes Smith, C. O. Cossey, Ted Dickens, P. Bolsover, Alys Collins, Barbara Niven, Emile Burns, A. Kettle, John Sommerfield, B. L. Coombes, and Jim Bowman.

The statement about Greece in the Lancashire section is not invented, since I felt that a genuine document would here have the most telling effect; all the names there given are of real people (statement of Corporal S. H. Starr). All the characters of the novel itself are wholly fictitious.

J. L.

I Problems of Choice

I

London

'EVERYONE'S WANTED in the big room,' said Phyllis as Mrs Watkins opened the door.

'What's it now?' Mrs Watkins, a broad-bosomed woman with her hair tied loosely in a bun, was trying to nurse her baby while pushing the ends of her blouse under the skirt-top.

'Another meeting to decide if we evacuate.'

'My mind's made up,' said Mrs Watkins aggressively, thrusting out her lower lip, 'and I won't be talked out of it. Milk, or I walk out.' Then, as Phyllis nodded agreement, she changed her tune. 'I hate to walk out, but I'm a mother first and last. I hate to have those crooks crowding over us.' She lifted the baby up and once more pulled her blouse out.

Phyllis nodded 'That's how we all feel.' She went on to the next door and knocked, while Mrs Watkins waited to hear how others took the news. 'Are you there, Mr Patterson?' Phyllis raised her voice. 'Everyone's waiting.'

'All right,' came a muffled reply. 'Wait till I've finished this bit.'

She knew that he was leaning against the window, holding up his book to get the last of the daylight. He'd found a cupboard full of books, mostly works of philosophy, and he'd spent all his time in the besieged building poring over them, saying it was a good chance to educate himself. Now he certainly wouldn't remember to come to the meeting till the light was quite gone, till he looked up and saw the stars sprinkled above the plane-trees of the square and, turning back to his page, found that night had blurred it all away.

She went back to the big room that had once been a ballroom and still had its mirrors muldewed but uncracked. Two candles made holes in the darkness; the windows were boarded up and night had already fallen within these walls. Except for the persons she had gone to knock up, everyone was present. Mrs Patterson, a lymphatic woman going prematurely bald, was holding her small son Jim by the hand and taking no notice of his efforts to tug away; she was swopping ailments with Mrs Russell, thin and grey-haired, who was darning socks and darting glances around all the while. Mr Watkins, smoothing his walrus

moustache, stood near a candle, reading a month-old newspaper. The other families were grouped along the walls, each a separate unit. Phyl's own family, the Tremaines: her small, wiry father and her large, smiling mother, with Herb for once quiet over a piece of wood and some string. The Kings, in their usual trimness, patiently waiting; the Harrises arguing sharply among themselves; the Eatons carrying on in a corner, young Kate having her hair plaited and Mr Eaton still making clothes-pegs. . . . Fifteen families in all.

Mrs Watkins came in with her baby, pushing her blouse-ends into place; but Mr Patterson had forgotten.

Phyl looked round at the groups, at the dim room with its two flickering candles that failed to light up the paintings on the ceiling. How excitedly they had all rushed into the blitzed hotel ten days ago. The lack of furniture had accentuated the feeling of space, the contrast with the cramped rooms from which they'd come. Then in a few hours all sorts of oddments had poured in from local sympathisers, camp-beds and mattresses, basins, buckets, crockery, tins of food, a half-sack of potatoes, a coffee-grinder without any coffee. . . . While Ted King, who was in charge, had gone round making sure that all the doors were securely bolted, all the ground-floor windows fastened or blocked. And then, while the supplies were still being brought along in armfuls, on handcarts, even in motor-cars, the police had closed in. And though the squatters had refused to come out and had managed to keep the police from getting in, they had been besieged from that moment.

Ted King went over into the space before the marble fireplace. He coughed to draw the others' attention. 'Well, friends,' he said in his slightly hoarse Cockney voice, 'I'm afraid the news is as black as ever. We all hoped public opinion would wake up in time to get the government down; but it hasn't. Most of the other squatters have had to give up.' He paused, dispirited despite his effort to get a cheerful note into his voice.

'My mussus says we're going,' Watkins broke in, ruefully rubbing his nose, 'and I can't say I'm sorry. She keeps blaming me for everything. So back to the coal-hole we come from.'

'Let's hold out a bit longer,' said Hogan, a lanky Irishman with a broken nose. 'Or if we've got to throw in, let's bash a few of the coppers on the way out.'

Nobody else said anything. They had all argued so much round their fears and hopes during the last few days that what they wanted most was an end of uncertainties. Tremaine moved uneasily, swallowed and thrust out his head. 'There's only one thing worries me,' he said plaintively. 'Will we be able to get back where we come from?' He

looked round at the others, and then fixed his glance on King.

Phyl felt ashamed of her father. 'It's the same for everyone,' she said in a voice that annoyed her by its sharpness.

'It was a poor sort of room,' he persisted, 'but better'n what some have to put up with.'

'It was a stinking place,' she interrupted vehemently; and only now, at this moment of giving-up, did she seem to realise just how ugly and confined their old quarters had been. Even in its blasted condition, with boards and sacking in most of the windows, with its thick dust and its bare rooms, with its cracked plaster and its damaged roofs, the hotel had been a new world, of breadth and dignity, full of adventurous possibilities.

'If only we could bash a few of them police first,' said Hogan. 'If one of them dares to grin or lay his little finger on me as we go out, I won't answer for what I'll be doing.'

King looked round at them all, and made an effort to rise to the occasion. 'There's only one thing I'd like to say. We mustn't feel we're going out in defeat. The shame's on the government and the landlords. We've stood up for ourselves. We've shown the world what all the talk about caring for the people really means. We can all rot away before the sacredness of property is threatened—even when a house is lying empty and useless—'

'Okay,' said Harris. 'And who gives a damn? Nobody but ourselves, and we knew it all before we started. So what?'

'It's not so simple,' said King, warming up. 'They don't like being shown up. We've struck a big blow at their rotten system, and they know it—'

'You're one of the comrades,' said Harris sarcastically. 'You don't mind if you go through hell as long as you put the bloody capitalists in the wrong—or as long as you think you've done it. But we're not politicians, like you; we've gone through hell long enough to want something of the other thing.'

'You took charge of things here,' said Hogan to King, looking for a chance to blame and attack someone.

'It was done by vote.'

Hogan laughed scornfully. 'You worked us up, and we were fools enough to listen. What use has it all been? What use to anyone but yourself?'

Phyl wanted to shout something rude. She stared at her father, hoping to stir him into speaking up in King's defence; but to her surprise it was her mother who spoke. 'That's enough, Mick. Are we going to let the landlords have it all their own way—throw us out and set us quarrelling among ourselves into the bargain?'

'No, no, not that,' said Hogan. 'I only want to crack them coppers outside, and Ted won't let me.'

'Aye, fair-play,' said Watkins. 'If a man could have worked better than Ted, show him to me.'

'I never said otherwise,' said Hogan. He smote himself on the chest. 'The first thing I remember in all the days of my life was the skirts of my mother on a wet and windy Wicklow morning, and herself weeping, and me weeping, and all the world weeping at the injustice of the police. For then they were turning us out of the farm my forefathers had held since the creation, and still they're at it. But I've no mind this day to put my head in my mother's skirts and weep, even if she were here, God rest her soul—and least of all when my stomach's crying out the way it is against the bitter cruelty of things.'

'You're not dead yet, Mick,' said King. 'Thurd time lucky. Amy Tremaine said all there is to say. The only way they can beat us is by making us turn on one another. You've got it all wrong, if you think I don't want a decent place to live in as much as you do. But I've learned one thing: as long as we stick together and fight, there's a meaning in life. If they beat us at one point, we break through in another.' He was speaking more confidently now; he felt that the others were throwing off the worst of their depression; he was getting into his own bones the realisation that the defeat was not a defeat, after all. These were the moments that made life worth living, the moments when he suddenly felt part of something vast, indomitable, endlessly struggling.

'I only hope we haven't lost that room of ours,' grumbled Tremaine again, and Phyl, fiercely ashamed, turned half away.

'Yes, we want houses now, not in ten years' time,' said Mrs Russell, copper-haired and buxom, speaking without heat, as if she thought that King might have overlooked this point.

'That's right,' he replied. 'That's why we came in here, and that's why we'll go on fighting when we leave.' He paused, feeling that he still hadn't found the right thing to say, the thing that would leave an enduring mark on all the squatters, and prevent the memory of their fortnight's siege from rankling with a sense of futility and failure. 'I'm not talking about castles in the air—the donkey's carrot. No, I mean something we've all shared. Don't forget how good we all felt when we first came in—as if we stood on our own feet at last, as if we'd thrown off a weight that was cracking our backs. Don't forget how many friends we found, how many things were poured in to help us—mostly from people as poor as ourselves. Don't forget how we got together and discussed every problem among ourselves. . . .'

Yes, at last he had found the thing he wanted to say. He saw the

expressions of apathy, weariness, hostility, all fading off the faces, and he began speaking with confidence.

Phyl relaxed. Without knowing why, she had a feeling that some danger had been passed and that now everything was all right. She looked at King with an admiring devotion that she didn't try to understand, and then at his frail big-browed wife, who was sitting on a box studying her finger-nails. Patterson came in, with his book under his arm, a short, furry-headed man with steel-rimmed glasses. 'What's happening?' he muttered. Trying to listen all the while to King, Phyl whispered back, and he went on muttering, 'I'm going to take the books. They were abandoned, yes, that's it, abandoned. . . .'

The Watkins baby began to howl, like a signal to close the meeting. King called for everyone to get their baggage into the main hall. Phyl went upstairs with her mother, and her father, who'd been told not to let go of Herb at all costs, followed limply behind.

'Whatever happens, I won't leave that mattress,' said Mrs Tremaine firmly. The Tremaines had been lucky enough to get a good kapok mattress donated by one of the better-off sympathisers in the neighbourhood, an article she had long coveted.

'It won't fit in the go-cart,' said Phyl.

'Father can carry it on his back.'

'What's that?' asked Tremaine, leaning against the door.

Amy Tremaine disregarded him. 'The Lord help us, we've got somehow twice as many things as when we came.' She looked round. 'We're going to take a sack of coal, too.'

They packed the aged perambulator till it sagged near breaking-point. Tremaine was clumsily tying the mattress up with rotten rope that broke whenever he pulled it hard. 'I'll carry my suitcase and push the pram, mum,' said Phyl. 'You take the things in the pillow-cases and look after Herb.'

'No tricks now,' said Mrs Tremaine to Herb, 'or I'll wallop you till you're sorry for yourself.' Herb grinned and nodded, and she went on, 'Phyl, show that father of yours how to tie a knot. What he thinks he was given fingers for, heaven only knows.'

Tremaine stood back, rubbing his hands. 'Why the hell did I come? I said it was madness, and I was right. Some people can't be born yet if they think they can just walk into the first empty house they see. I blame myself for not putting my foot down.'

'It wasn't just the first empty house,' said Phyl shrilly. 'This borough has got tens of thousands of empty houses hardly damaged at all, and the Council won't do a thing—'

'And so that's why they'll let us walk into one like lords and ladies, eh?' He spat. 'I blame myself for being got down by a pack of stupid women.'

'Well, it's been a holiday. What's biting you?'

She knew the answer well enough. He was afraid he'd lost his plastering job; but he was even more afraid of putting his fear into words. 'I'm worried we'll have lost our place in Selby Street,' he mumbled.

'Now where has Herb got to?' cried Mrs Tremaine in dismay.

'I'll find him,' said Phyl. 'He's with Greg Harris, for certain.' She found him and Greg in an attic preparing to climb out on to the roof; and by the time she drove them downstairs, the moment of departure had come. Herb slid down the banisters and almost knocked Watkins over. Then Mrs Harris remembered that she'd left something on a shelf; and Patterson discarded two volumes of his history of philosophy, changed his mind for the fifth time, and wrapped the books up in his tattered overcoat. 'It grows on you,' he said apologetically. Two babies began yelling.

King stubbed a cigarette and went over to the front door. 'Everyone ready?' He loosed the chains and turned the big key. Phyl, leaning against a niche in the wall, stared at the door with a touch of panic, as if she didn't know what monster mightn't loom up out of the city darkness. But the door opened and nothing happened. King stepped outside. He called something to the police 'Sergeant. . . .'

They all began moving towards the door, afraid now of definite things, arrests, batons, loss of their meagre property, charges of theft, takings of names and addresses so that they could be lawfully persecuted for evermore. Hogan was talking fast and furious, half to himself, 'They give you a shove just when you're off the balance. . . . I won't stand for it. . . . Once in Liverpool. . . .'

'Shut your trap,' said Harris. 'You'll do us all in.'

Suddenly someone struck up the *International*. A few voices joined in, then more. Then everyone was singing. The first notes had frightened some of the squatters; the police might be provoked into an attack. But as the song surged up in increasing loudness, even the most timid lost their fear and joined in; and all the things that King had said at the meeting in the ballroom, things that they hadn't believed or had only half-believed, became suddenly and powerfully true. Now, in the moment of loss, it was theirs, the hotel, the union, the purpose, held in a resolute moment of song which echoed on into the future, into the environing darkness and beyond.

The singing ended and King reappeared. 'Come on out. One lot at a time.'

The people in front jammed in the half-open door. King was shouting, but everyone wanted to get away now as quickly as possible. The Tremaines were in the rear. Will Tremaine bent under the mattress

and pushing with one hand; Amy Tremaine cuffing Herb when he pulled away, and Phyl saying over and over, 'What's the hurry?' But King soon had order restored, and the families went out one after the other, laden with parcels, pushing prams and handcarts, clutching children and hushing babies. . . . At last the Tremaines were near the door. Phyl got one wheel of the pram caught in something, and Herb bumped into her, making things worse. Then they were outside, in the vast night.

Someone flashed a torch in their faces and King said, 'These are the Tremaines.' And Tremaine was asked to show his identity-card. He staggered back against the railing, dropped the mattress, and began feverishly fumbling in his inner pockets, getting his hand caught in a tear, trembling with haste. Phyl threw her head back and looked up over the dark masses of the trees, at the sparse stars in the heavy skies. She felt a warm stinging in her scalp, a beating as of wings about her, and forgot the scene of humiliation. I'll never give in, she thought, and seemed speaking to the stars, to the enormous night of the hulking trees.

Then at last they moved on again, over the roadway and under the trees; they passed from the zone of danger into the sidelines, uncertain yet whether they had escaped or whether they'd be drawn back into the inquisition of the police-light. 'Why did he want to see my card?' Tremaine kept asking in a strained whisper. He dropped the mattress against the rough wooden fence which had replaced the iron bars taken up for the war-effort, and wiped his brow. 'Now I'm done for.'

'They want to scare us,' said Phyl fiercely.

Someone ran across, and for a moment she shrank, fearing that a policeman had heard her words. But it was Ted King. He pressed her hand. 'Can't let you go without thanking you. You were fine.' And he ran back to the hotel steps. Phyl stood flushed in the shadow, glad that her mother couldn't see her face, and went on over the events of the last fortnight, trying to think why King had said that. She'd volunteered for various odd jobs, and she'd wanted to fight on till the last. . . . Perhaps it was that time she'd made peace between Mrs Harris and Mrs Watkins, when the feeling of defeat and the shortage of food had begun to fray tempers. Or the time she managed to catch hold of Mrs Hogan when she slipped on the stairs with the baby in her arms. Her thoughts drifted from the quest of her own virtues to other memories of the squatting fortnight, the dances they'd had in the big room to the music of cracked records on an old gramophone, the political study-group that Ted King had led, the conversations she'd had with Mr Patterson (in which she'd understood only about a tenth of his discourses on philosophy, and ended with a suspicion he

didn't understand much more himself), the problems they'd had of keeping the old disused kitchen-range going until Greg and Herb found an unnoticed cellar half full of coal. But what had it been that made King think she was fine?

'What did he say?' Tremaine persisted.

'He said to mind your own business,' replied his wife. 'Come on now.'

He groaned and tried to heave the rolled mattress up, lurching against the palings and helped by Herb, who put his head under the mattress-end and shoved with shouts of glee. 'Stop him,' mumbled Tremaine, stumbling forward, 'he'll bring the coppers on us.' Mrs Tremaine slung a pillow-case over each shoulder, Phyl, pushing her pram with one hand, started off the trek; and Tremaine followed, groaning.

The journey home took over three hours of dull dogged misery. The main trouble was the mattress. Several times Tremaine gave up in distracted weariness, but his wife refused to relent. 'As long as we get that mattress out of it all, we won't feel they beat us.' Tremaine's knees sagged and his head sank lower and lower; and he went on complaining bitterly in a low voice. Once the chief length of rope snapped in the middle of the road, and he had to haul the mattress along through the mud to escape a lorry; and once he fell forward on his face.

Phyl offered to take her turn while he pushed the pram; but he refused. Nobody was going to say they'd seen him push a pram while his daughter struggled under a ton of kapok. Only Herb enjoyed the anguished progress, running round and round his bowed-down father, shouldering the mattress up and trying to guess in what direction it was going to slip next.

As he slid his burden down in the dark entry of a lane, Tremaine muttered, 'What's the use? When we get there, we'll find the room's gone. What a fool I was.'

'Have a pint and get your strength back,' said his wife soothingly. 'Have a Guinness.'

He grumbled and refused; but at last she took him by the shoulders and pushed him towards the corner pub. He went off relieved, though reluctant to part with his grievance and staggering with the sudden lightness of his body after the long trudge under the mattress.

Phyl would have liked to sit on her suitcase; but it wasn't strong enough. She tried to undo a bit of knotted string, to tie the suitcase on the pram's handle-bar. Everything she valued of her possessions was in the suitcase, and she wasn't going to take any chances about losing it. Then Mrs Tremaine, worried about her husband's long absence, sent Herb to peep in at the pub-door.

He came racing back. 'He's gone to sleep.' So Phyl went along and found her father slumped in a corner. She gave him a push, but he merely nodded more strenuously and shook his head.

'He just swallowed his pint and dozed straight off,' said the scraggy barmaid. 'Hold him by the nose, dearie, then he'll splutter and wake up.'

Phyl shook her father with her free hand, and at last he awoke. He stared and said thickly, 'What you doing such place?' stood up, sat down again, frowned heavily, and yawned.

'Take him out and lose him,' said the barmaid kindly.

Tremaine stood swaying a moment in the street, yawned again, and then walked back to the lane. 'I didn't sleep a wink last night,' he said in defiant and self-pitying apology. 'Not a wink. And you know it.'

He fell down when Herb tried to shove the mattress up on his back; and Mrs Tremaine began to fear she'd have to abandon her prize, after all. But the moment she weakened, Tremaine turned obstinate. 'If it kills me, you'll know who's to blame,' he observed; and after slithering about awhile he set out at a better pace than before, till he knocked into a lamp-post and fell over sideways.

Once more Herb helped him to a start, while Mrs Tremaine grew more and more worried at his pallid face and stertorous breathing. But he persisted in his headlong stagger, guided on by Herb. Phyl pushed in the rear, at times left far behind, then coming abreast after one of Tremaine's accidents. Gratefully she began to recognise landmarks, and then at last they were near home.

Herb darted off with a whoop despite his mother's calls, but for once proved himself a maligned character by returning with Matt Lee, the docker who had married Nell, the elder Tremaine girl. In no time Matt, roaring with laughter, had taken the mattress from Tremaine's back, shouldered it expertly, and set off down the road at an easy upright pace. Tremaine leaned against the wall. 'My heart's kicking like a horse. If I die, you'll know who's to blame.'

'You shouldn't have done it, Will, you shouldn't,' said his wife, now remorsefully near tears.

'Ask him if the room's still alright,' panted Tremaine. 'It's sure to be gone. Cat's-paws, that's what we've been, cat's-paws.'

'Can you put us up for a day or two if need be?' asked Mrs Tremaine, catching up with her son-in-law.

'You better ask Nell,' he replied, scratching his stiff sandy hair. 'I like a crowd; but Nell's your own daughter. You better ask her.'

'I'll see if our room's empty,' said Phyl impatiently.

She ran off, still carrying her suitcase. Matt and Tremaine went to have a quick one at *The Cock* before closing-time. Mrs Tremaine

lugged the mattress into a doorway, while Herb, seeing two friends of his own age, sprinted across the road, narrowly missed by a car, to boast about his squatting exploits.

'You'll be the death of me,' said Mrs Tremaine, to nobody in particular.

Phyl came running down the kerb, with dark ringlets tossing. 'We're saved,' she cried. 'It's been let, but nobody's moving in till tomorrow. We've got time.'

'Fetch father and Matt from *The Cock*,' said Mrs Tremaine. 'We can but hope. Where's Herb?'

So, without Herb they resumed their journey. Mrs Tremaine went ahead to announce their return to the Bantings, the family who sublet the room where they had lodged. Phyl left the pram in charge of Matt, and hurried up with her suitcase, to give her mother any needed backing. Mrs Banting, a flat greying woman with a cough, was evading all responsibility before God, the Law, and the Tremaines. 'They paid me five shillings down, and I spent it, why shouldn't I? I want everybody to have a fair deal, so help me God. Sort it out, if you can; only don't drag me into it.'

'Wouldn't you rather have us than someone you don't know?'

'I'm not saying I wouldn't, but I'm not going to be dragged into someone else's troubles. You sort it out with Mrs Watson in the morning when she comes. I've nothing against you, nor against her neither. Only you're the devil we know, I suppose—eh, father?'

Mr Banting, in shirt-sleeves and rag slippers, pushed back his latest pair of spectacles (he was always buying new ones in the nearest street-market) and grunted. The large Banting girl, Ruby, who had something missing in her head but managed to do odd charring jobs, began uttering, covering her mouth with her broad stubby hand. The boy was still out, but the younger girl, aged seven, under the table, was drawing with white chalk on the brown linoleum.

Phyl stood listening a moment amid the pots and pans that hung all round the small landing, then went in, 'We'll pay Mrs Banting,' she suggested, 'and she can pay the deposit back.'

'Not on your life,' replied Mrs Banting. 'If you cause trouble, you got to deal with it. I won't stop you coming in, but it's your pigeon then. You'll have took the law into your own hands, and it's up to you to pay back all deposits. I want everyone to get a fair deal, but how they sort it out is no business of mine.'

'Didn't they put you in jail?' asked Banting with momentary interest; but as no one answered, he returned to his football coupon.

Matt appeared with the loaded pram. 'Here you are, ma,' he said to Mrs Tremaine. 'I'll bring up the mattress, too, and then your old man

and me will settle the universe over a last half-pint. He's done in.'

'Wait a moment,' said Mrs Tremaine. But he was already whistling down the stairs, and a few moments later he came up with the mattress nicely balanced on his shoulders, deposited it in the middle of the room, and went off with a wink at Mrs Banting, whom he didn't like.

'You didn't have that when you went,' said Mrs Banting, regarding the mattress with interest; for though somewhat smeared by its passage through the streets, it was still an impressive object. 'I won't have no stolen goods in here, Amy Tremaine.'

'It was given us,' said Mrs Tremaine indignantly.

'How do you know it wasn't stolen in the first place?' asked Banting, pulling his spectacles onto the tip of his nose. 'It's a bit fishy, giving away a mattress like that.'

'It's not fishy at all,' Phyl interjected.

'How do you know?' asked Banting in his most crushing manner. 'All right, Miss Know-all, tell me why you wasn't prosecuted with the utmost rigidity of the law.'

'Because we didn't do anything wrong.'

'I'll tell you. Because they've served warrants on the ring-leaders. Five of 'em, all communalists, Ted Bramley among 'em, summonsed for inciting to trespass.' Banting liked to insert an extra syllable or two in his words to make them grander. 'If they took up a lot of small fry, it'd provoke sympathy and confusate things. So they let you out of the net. You're only minnows, you are. Minnows,' he repeated with rhetorical satisfaction as if he expected Phyl to shrink to half her size under his scathing metaphor, and looked round for applause.

But the heads of household were already deep in a more serious matter, the disposal of the large mattress. There were two rooms, with water-tap and small gas-stove on the landing. The Tremaines had had the inner room, which was the smaller; and Mrs Banting was suggesting that if they wanted it back, the least they could do was to exchange their new mattress for her present horse-hair one, which was too small for the brass-knobbed bed. 'I'll throw in the arm-chair,' she pleaded, 'it only wants a bit of mending underneath.' But as Mrs Tremaine was weakening, Phyl looked into the inner room, and found that the few sticks left behind by the Tremaines had been sold—the cast-iron bed, the screen, and the picture of the Siege of Mafeking—so that nothing was left but a ragged bit of carpet and some linoleum, a bamboo-table, a stool, and two chairs with burst cane-bottoms. 'I was within my rights,' said Mrs Banting, 'you said that if you was gone a week, you was gone for ever.' So Mrs Tremaine grew more determined to hold fast to her one remaining pledge of a decent status in society, the kapok mattress.

Phyl and her mother carried it into the inner room. There was a camp-bed and a bolster from the pram for Phyl's and Herb's use; and Mrs Banting put her head in to say that the small mattress wasn't sold, only lent to Mrs Dove on the ground floor who'd had a baby and whose sister was staying with her—it'd be returned tomorrow. Mrs Tremaine remarked that Herb could sleep at the foot of the mattress for one night, and so Phyl could have the camp-bed.

Phyl slipped out and hurried down the street. There was a light in the window of the Kaplan's flat, and so she went up and knocked. Mrs Kaplan opened the door, sullen faced, and said, yes, Kath was in; and Phyl passed through to Kath's little room, which she envied beyond measure. Kath was drying her hair at the gas-fire, lying on the floor on her back with her feet up on the bed. 'Hullo, Phyl, fancy seeing you,' she said, putting aside a paper-covered book, *Death with a Cocktail*, but otherwise staying as she was. She wore a loose pink dressing-gown and cami-knickers. 'How did it go?'

'They got us out in the end,' said Phyl, stepping over Kath to sit on the bed. 'But it was ever so much fun while it lasted.'

Kath reached out and felt for a packet of Woodbines, which she tossed into Phyl's lap. 'What did you do? I've seen the place. No lights, I suppose. Must have been dark at night, eh?'

'We had some candles,' said Phyl vaguely. She lighted a Woodbine and drew at it. Sitting there and looking down at Kath, she saw the fortnight's experience with a new sort of glamour, the dull lengths of waiting and uncertainty dimmed away, and only the adventurous moments remained. 'We did all sorts of things.'

'I bet you did,' said Kath with a slight touch of jealousy. 'Such as?'

'Well,' said Phyl meditatively, as if choosing from a multitude of enjoyments, 'we had concerts, of course. One man was terrific on the mouth-organ, and lots of us sang. We had discussions, too. They were interesting—really they were.'

'Dances?'

'Oh yes, dances. Dick—the one who played the mouth-organ—was ever so good at waltzes and things like that; and we had a rackerly old gramophone.'

'Who did you dance with?'

'Well, there was Bill Harris—you don't know him, he comes from Stepney—he was gone on Madge. You don't know her either, she comes from Whitechapel. And they hadn't ever met before. It was quite a romance.'

'And who was gone on you?'

'Nobody in particular.' Phyl took a deep draw at the Woodbine and choked a little. 'I just had a good time.' She patted her chest. 'There

was—oh, lots and lots. But it's no use saying the names when you don't know 'em.'

'Maybe I'll come along next time.' Kath sat up and ran her fingers through her hair. 'That'll do.' She began pinning it up.

'What's happened to my job at Bellini's?'

'Gone—what do you think? A tall girl with a crinkle in her nose. I don't know her; I just looked in.'

'Any chance at your place? Father's dead scared he'll be laid off that L.C.C. job of his.'

'It's not so easy,' said Kath, studying herself in a hand-mirror. 'There's an awful lot of people after the jobs at places like ours. And you wouldn't have much chance, anyway, without experience.'

'What about yourself?'

'That was luck, my love—and personality.' She postured with her hands behind her head, and gave a sidelong glance at Phyl, who noted it with a touch of resentment. 'All the same, I'll let you know if there's a vacancy coming up.' She was still both proud and secretive about the job she had got some three months before at a large hotel and restaurant in the West End.

'I'll find something, don't bother.' Phyl stood up, smoothing her dress. 'What have you been doing all the while?'

'Same old things, though I went to a hop last Friday with somebody you'd never guess. Who do you think?'

'You said I'd never guess.'

'Try, all the same.'

'Dave.'

Kath pouted, still pinning up her hair. 'Someone must have told you.'

Phyl moved over to the door. 'I just wanted to find out about that job of mine. Father's in a bad mood. He's got a cold on the chest, too. If he's sacked by the L.C.C., he'll blame me.'

'He'll be sacked all right,' said Kath airily. 'They'll have their knife into him now. What did you think?'

But as she went down the stairs, Phyl was smiling to herself with parted lips, and thinking once more over the bewildering fortnight. Thinking: I was fine, was I? How was I fine? Of course I was. . . . And as she stepped out into the street, she felt again all she had felt when she came out of the besieged hotel into the enormous night of trees and stars, small and lost and defeated, and yet somehow at the heart of things, not beaten at all. She seemed to be looking down on herself from above, saying: That's Phyl Tremaine down there in the street. You'd never guess what she's been through this last fortnight. She's Phyl Tremaine, Phyl Tremaine. As if the whole secret of her ex-

perience was enclosed in her name, which sounded strange and exciting. Phyl Tremaine, she's fine. I'd like to know more about her. That girl's got something. Just keep your eye on her.

2

Lancashire

IF HE HAD come back in summering weather, he mightn't have found the contrast so extreme. But on this dull autumnal day, with the wind blowing wet from the west, with dull musty clouds driving and twisting overhead, he discovered that three years in India, Burma, and Malaya had made him forget what things were really like at home. The hills blurred out in rain mists, lost in a rush of slanted threads, then swathed in a heavy slate-grey as though their tops were being ground to damp dust and falling slowly down in this billowing and extending confusion. The sky was drifting lower and lower, grazing the chimney-tops, the desolation of mills and ironworks, breweries and knacker-yards, furnaces and muddy canals, chemical works and pitheads, whose smoke helped to confound earth and sky in the common death-grey. And streets on streets of crushed grey houses. As he stared moodily out, a flurry of rain dashed against the carriage window, like a retort of anger from the homeland for which he was feeling such an unexpected distaste.

The two men opposite, who had been chatting in low voices, spoke up louder. 'Never mind how big he is, I says. A man only counts from the chin up. I left him winded. Aye, I says, you've got as much light in that head of yours as a glowworm's got in its arse.'

They laughed, and their voices sank again as the wind howled. But Dick felt less out of things. The clear, hard, confident Lancashire voices made him feel at home at last, despite the grey wind and the cluttered smoke-stacks. He dozed, woke fitfully, glanced again at the gusty webs of rain, dozed. At last he sat up with more interest, awakened by the name of a familiar station and trying to settle his coat over his shoulders. The ready-made demob coat was tight in the armpits; he was half sorry he hadn't taken the bright blue suit, which fitted him better, instead of the slightly tight brown sports jacket and the slightly large grey slacks. He had chosen at last in desperation; any civilian clothes were better than the sweaty khaki battle-dress.

Now he dozed again, and woke to find that he had arrived and dusk had come. He snatched the suitcase and the cardboard box from the

rack, and one of the men opposite remarked, 'You need webbed feet for this sort of weather.'

He hurried out into the big, dim vault of the station, and for a moment couldn't get his bearings, then made for the Way Out. The rain was lashing at the rails and the wind was cold after the closed-in carriage. He wondered if his telegram had arrived in time; if there'd be anyone to meet him at the barriers. I hope not. He buttoned up his overcoat with its stiff button-holes; and at the barrier he half-expected the ticket-collector to recognise him—he was sure he knew him well by sight. No one recognised him, no one was there to meet him. He felt a twinge of disappointment. Rain or no rain, Alice might have come along.

Outside, he walked over to the nearest point where the trams stopped. No. 23 would take him almost all the way home. But he had to wait nearly a quarter of an hour at the inadequate shelter till the right number came up, clanging and splashing, and he was afraid he wouldn't get a seat—there were half a dozen women with shopping-bags ahead of him. But he just managed it. His coat was sopping, and the demob felt hat was tight on his brow; he tilted it back and the water in the brim ran down his neck. Climbing to the top, he lighted a cigarette and felt better as the tram swung on into the town centre. There was the Town Hall, with the white lavish additions that everyone had been so proud of in 1919, all stone lions and arcades of Corinthian pillars, now rather dingied—with a battered and soaked garden waste in the middle of the square. The large cinema opposite flaunted its gilt splendours and its revelations (*Terror at Noon* . . . and something with a Bevy of Broadway Beauties), and obviously outpaced the Town Hall as the centre of town-life. Then the tram crashed off down one of the main shopping streets and into an industrial area with workshops and slum houses, forbidding chapels and rows of grimly identical residences.

He now felt only a confused ache of memory and a growing desire to be home. A thin hook-nosed man with a gaudy scarf sat next to the man in the seat ahead, and was greeted: 'You're looking up, it seems. In work at last, eh?'

'I'll never work no more,' said the other glibly. 'I've an independent fortune every Friday. That's what suits me.'

They laughed, and Dick rubbed the steam off the window to watch the various landmarks of his homecoming—streets and shops and chapels that he hadn't seen for three years. The rain was a mist of separation, preventing him from feeling quite a part of the familiar world that he was re-entering, and yet a necessary aspect of that world, swaddling him in with no nonsense, no pretences of things being

different than they had been. And so he felt as if he were merely coming back from a day-excursion to Manchester, as if he were a ghost blown back by a grey wind on to a smudged scene where he couldn't get a proper grip of anything. Suddenly the rush of a tram going by in the opposite direction, and the gleam of the line stretching ahead, brought up a memory that made him smile. At school he'd won first prize in the essay competition organised yearly by the Society for the Beautifying of Our Town. He'd suggested that the tram-lines should be taken up and lines of trees planted—poplars, if he remembered correctly—and that all the houses along Cobden Avenue be painted green. At the prize-giving the Mayor had shaken his hand, and he'd received a leather-bound copy of *Pickwick Papers* and been told he had a promising future. What on earth had made him think out the plan of poplars and green paint? His school-days were remote, lost in a vaguer mist than the distances of the rain.

He got down at the fare-stage. He was so used to getting off there, to save a penny, that he'd mentioned it as his destination to the conductor, and now he'd have to walk an unnecessary block in the rain. Then he turned to the left, into the tangled streets and side-streets, cobbled still, with foul muddy alleys and little yards of cinders and rubbish-tins. He crossed a canal, and the space where some old buses and a railway-carriage had been dumped for homes; then came out into a slightly better area.

He stopped before a house with two whitened steps and a small railed garden, about two feet deep, with some depressed-looking privet bushes. Knocked at the door and stood with thumping heart. He heard the scraping of a chair, someone called, and then the door opened. It was Alice. She stared, then cried out with a faint squeak, 'Oh, it's Dick,' and stood back. He came in and put the suitcase and the cardboard-box down, unbuttoning the difficult buttons of his overcoat. 'Dick,' she said again, more loudly, and clasped him round the neck. 'Oh-oo, you're wet.' She drew away, leaned over and kissed him on the cheek. 'Mother's been all on edge. Why didn't you send a wire?'

'I did.' He frowned and wanted to push her aside, but the next moment he heard his mother at the kitchen door. 'Yes, mum, here I am.'

Alice let him pass. He got his coat off at last, threw it down on the passage-chair, and opened his arm to his mother's embrace. She kissed him, sobbing, 'What a fool I am! I said to myself, whatever I do I won't cry. And look at me. What a silly old fool I am.' All his irritation left him, and he hugged his mother, happy now, happy at last and incredibly come home. He was vaguely aware of his father standing by the kitchen range with his coat off and a newspaper in his hand,

his spectacles precariously balanced on the tip of his nose, and his brow a trifle balder than before; then he forgot everyone but his mother. A choking impulse to burst into tears bewildered him; but he controlled it, and pushed his mother away, holding her by the arms.

'Why, you look younger. It's a fact.'

She laughed, and her laugh was young. 'I've never known time and worry make a face look younger yet.' But she was herself again, brushing her tears away with the end of her flowered apron and looking round for something to do. Mr Baxter came slowly forward.

'Hullo, son. . . . So you're back again. Sorry we couldn't find a better day to welcome you. But, then, we weren't sure when you were arriving.'

'I sent a wire this morning.'

'Here, take a seat.' His mother pushed him into a chair with arms that three generations of Baxters had worn smooth. 'And I'll make you a cup of tea. Alice, get out that old pair of slippers and I'll warm them up. Here.' She wanted to bend down and undo his shoes, but he pushed her gently away and unlaced them himself. She handed him a patched pair of carpet slippers. 'Come and sit closer to the fire. Oh dear me, I don't know where I am.'

'Shall I run round and see if Pat's home yet?' asked Alice. 'I know she meant to come home early, in case he turned up.'

'No,' said Dick, 'let's keep to the family for the moment.'

'She'll be hurt if she hears you came home and nobody told her,' protested Alice. Dick glanced at her. She hadn't changed much, only a bit plumper, and that made her look fairer, more rosy-checked. She had her hair done differently; there were more small curls or something, he wasn't sure what, but it helped to bring out the roundness of her face. And his mother, too, seemed much the same at first glance; but now he thought she had more wrinkles round her eyes and she looked tired. Only his father was unchanged, with the same old twinkle in his grey eyes, and the same way of pointing his finger at you before he spoke. A bit balder, perhaps, a bit slower in speaking—but that might have been the result of his trying to stay dignified while the women fussed about. Alice had gone off into the passage, from which she now announced obstinately, 'I'll go and tell her.'

'Well, how are you feeling, lad?' asked Baxter as his wife bustled about with the tea-things.

'You're free of that fever!' said Mrs Baxter, pausing anxiously.

'Absolutely. The sea-trip set me up good and proper.'

There was another pause. Baxter reverted to a broader Lancashire turn of phrase, as he did when he felt disturbed and laboriously sought

for the sententious thing to cap a situation, 'Aye, when there's so much to say, a man's mind gets all of a flumter. There's no knowing where to start, like a right-ravelled hank o' thread.'

'It takes time,' agreed Dick, staring drowsily into the kitchen fire. At one moment he felt as if he had never gone away; the next as if he were in a strange house, picking his words with care. 'You know how a dog turns round and round sometimes before he settles down—though where he ends up is where he started.'

'It takes time,' repeated Baxter. 'And you'll find a lot of changes here, too.'

'Not as many as all that,' Mrs Baxter interrupted, with the refilled kettle in her hand. 'If you judged by the newspapers, you'd think the bottom had fallen out of things, but nothing's changed much.'

'Your mother's not speaking politically, as you might say,' said Baxter. 'You've come back just in time. New Year is Vesting Day.'

'What's that to him?' asked Mrs Baxter with a note of asperity. 'I won't have you trying to send our Dick down the pit again.'

Dick evaded the half-question in her voice, and his father went on unperturbed, 'That's up to him. It's a free country. But apart from all that, surely he can come along and see the nation's flag go up over the pit-head.'

'I'd like to see it all right,' said Dick vaguely. 'But I want a bit of a holiday before I settle down. As you were saying, things have changed. Maybe I've changed a bit, too. Anyway, I'm three years older. I want to feel my way about for a while.'

'That's sense enough,' said his father. 'Nobody wants to push you.'

But Mrs Baxter refused to drop the subject of the pit at once. 'You were glad enough when you hurt your leg just at the right moment to get you the checkweighing job. It's because you've been on the top so long that you want others to go down the pit—just because you've got a Coal Board instead of the old Directors.'

'Ah,' said Baxter, 'why shouldn't I take a pride in the pit now we've wrenched it from the bloody hands of the owners—'

'You're not at the Lodge now. And don't forget it was easy for you to keep a free tongue in your head because it was the men who paid you out of their pennies—'

'Hey, hey, that's enough,' cried Dick. 'I didn't come home to hear you two argibarging. I came home for a cup of tea. All the way from Singapore, too.'

'Beg, what am I about?' she said, and hurried to the range. The front door opened and Alice came scampering in. 'Don't make all that scatter o' rain about,' Mrs Baxter complained. 'Look at you,

panting like a porpoise-pig. Leave your coat in the passage, and then tell us what you've got to say.'

Alice made a grimace and went out. Mrs Baxter turned to Dick. 'And we had such plans for a slap-up party in the parlour, and now they've all gone up in smoke and good intentions. Dearie me, I hope that's not an omen about the cakes in the oven.' She knelt down by the stove, and opened its door carefully with apron-guarded hand. 'Ah, my tea-cakes always fall the butterside down.'

Dick was glad that the parlour party was upset. Apart from the parlour being cold and damp, he had never lost his childhood's awe of its photos—coarse enlargements in which hawk-nosed old ladies in bonnets and men with cropped heads and a straight fringe flopping over the brow stared him out of countenance. Worst of all was the very blurred version of grandfather, which looked like a scared owl staring through a ragged doormat. Once or twice as a child he had been locked in the room for some offence, and owl-grandfather had seemed about to pounce on him at any moment, reading all the wicked thoughts inside his head.

Alice came back, tossing her loosened curls. 'You brought the wind with you, Dick, up from the sea. Yesterday was as quiet as a duck-pond. What I was going to say when everyone interrupted me was that Pat isn't home yet, so I left a message for her to come straight over.'

She was perter, more self-assured as well as plumper. But you expected to see a difference between seventeen and twenty in a girl.

'Still at the mill?' Dick asked.

She nodded. 'Suits me all right, and I'm pretty good at it now. You wouldn't know the mill if you saw it now. It's been cleaned up proper. You heard that Pat's at Chalcot's?'

'Yes, she wrote.'

'She's a clever girl,' said Mrs Baxter. 'While she was at the filling-factory, she went to night-school, and now she's a short-hand typist. Still, it was a bit of luck, her getting into such a respectable old firm as Chalcot's.'

'All lawyers are scoundrels,' observed Baxter with amiable dogmatism, 'and they build their houses on the heads of fools. Chalcot's one of the worst, in with the big landlords. But he's near the end of his tether. Wait till the land is nationalised like steel and the pits.'

'They haven't nationalised steel yet, have they?' asked Dick.

'No, but they will in a year or so. You'll see. And land, too.'

'Can't you talk about something better'n politics,' asked Mrs Baxter, 'after three years and more? Heaven be praised, the tea-cakes aren't

burnt.' She was busy loading the table with the high-tea, scones and pies and jams and cakes and tripe.

'We used to have street parties and banners across the road and all sorts of things like that,' said Alice. 'But the war's been over too long. You won't get anything like that.'

'For which many thanks.'

She was leaning against the table with her head in her hands, looking him over, and he didn't like it. 'Well, you might have picked one of those green or blue suits,' she said at last. 'There's chaps at the mull who wear 'em. I like bright colours.'

'I wanted to please myself, not you.'

She went on, still staring, 'What kind of a job are you going to take? Pat wouldn't like you going back to the pit—'

'That's enough,' said Mrs Baxter. 'I won't have everyone mithering him the moment he comes home.'

'How's Mike Beevers?' asked Dick.

'He got out of the army by volunteering to come back to the pit,' said Baxter. 'Good lad, too. He was the youngest and the noisiest on the Pit Production Committee, and didn't the management do their best to get rid of him! But those bad old days are gone now, and Mr Henderson is manager—not under-manager any longer.'

'But look at the trouble we had to get our last deliveries of coal,' said Mrs Baxter. 'Your committee saw the coal-clerk, and he said he had his orders from someone else; and so you saw this official and that, and each one passed you on, till you came to the top and bumped your heads on the ceiling. Then you were sent back to the coal-clerk, and he had to take the blame; but all the while you knew it was someone else.'

'It's Mr Rickards, the new under-manager,' said Baxter.

But his wife cut him short. 'Now pull up, Dick, and get your tea, and have some of that tripe.'

'It's the last wriggle of the old management,' Baxter went on. 'Just to show how nasty they feel on the way out.'

'But I thought you were keeping on the same management,' said Alice.

'You don't understand these things,' he replied, folding up his spectacles and putting them into his waistcoat pocket. 'How can it be the same when the pits are nationalised? But what's the use of arguing with you?'

'None at all,' said Mrs Baxter. 'Come on, get your tea.'

'The only time I went down a mine was the model one at Blackpool,' said Alice, 'and that was a waste of threepence.'

There was a knock at the front door, and Alice ran to answer it.

Mrs Baxter nodded at Dick. He filled his mouth with a piece of tripe and spluttered, and was still spluttering when Patricia Hemans came in, with Alice dodging behind. 'Here he is at last,' said Mrs Baxter. Then another knock on the front door made Alice gape and run back, and the others waited, smiling desultorily.

She returned, laughing and waving a yellow envelope. 'Telegram for Baxter.'

'It must be mine,' said Dick.

And it was. Everyone laughed, and Pat sat down by Dick. She asked him about his journey home and the demob delays, and he was able to have a good look at her. Yes, here was one of the changes. This Pat wasn't at all like the Pat of his memories, who cycled and swam and danced with him. She was better-dressed, yes, dressed in a different way, with a sort of cool efficient taste, rather like a first-rate shorthand typist in a film, with white silk blouse and tailored dark skirt. Hair done simply but expensively, and a glossy look generally; tiny gold wrist-watch. Not quite all that, but near enough. She caught his eye and smiled back.

When she smiled, he saw the Pat he had known, the Pat smiling at him from the worn photo that still lay in the pocket-book against his heart. But, watching her with that sense of something changed, he grew aware that the family was divided in its attitudes. Alice wholeheartedly, and Mrs Baxter with some reservations, were partisans of the new Pat, while Baxter didn't like her much. Dick knew that the touch of extra-politeness towards her in his father's words was an expression of dislike if not hostility.

And this discovery of the different reactions of the family to Pat pleased him. It made him feel at home in an odd sort of way; made him feel that at last he was right inside things, no longer a blundering stranger who had to ask questions, but a member of the family circle who had got his bearings right. And, seeing Pat here among the others, he felt drawn towards his father, somehow taking his side in the unstated family division—though not against Pat. He still felt that he couldn't bring the two Pats together; but he didn't hold that against the Pat of the present. No, he was interested and thought her more handsome than he'd remembered. He wanted to get at grips with her and find how things really stood; and meanwhile it was pleasant to accept the family view, which Pat herself seemed to accept, that they were lovers who had never been formally engaged, but who would certainly have been married in 1943 if Pat hadn't fallen ill and he hadn't gone abroad earlier than expected.

Alice remembered something in his last letter home about presents, and asked what he'd brought for her. Dick got up shyly, and fetched

the things from the passage. Some silk-embroidered stuffs for the women and a carved pipe for his father. Mrs Baxter stroked the dragon-shawl and said with a dazed sort of smile, 'It's gradely fine stuff, but I'm too old for such faldelals.' Alice wanted to snatch it, but she folded it up and put it on the mantelpiece, telling her to keep her fingers to herself.

'Wait till Joe sees me in this,' said Alice, draping herself with her own piece of embroidered flowers. She kissed Dick. 'You're not a bad sort, not really.'

'It's lovely,' said Pat. 'Thanks more than I can say.' But she didn't kiss him.

Mr Baxter smiled over his pipe. 'It isn't so often that the kiting brings the old cat a mouse. I'll keep the pipe clean till I get some slap-up bacca to christen it.'

Dick went on asking about various friends. 'And that girl with the straight black fringe—I can't think of her name for the moment.'

Pat knitted her smooth brows. 'Oh yes, Rosita. She married an R.A.F. pilot, and now they're at Bristol. She had a baby about two years ago, and when I last heard, a few months ago, she was expecting another.'

'Jimmy Higginbotham.'

'He was killed by a fall of stone,' said Baxter. 'Wedged between a truck and a prop, last August.'

Mrs Baxter produced some mince-pies and another pot of tea. 'I've been doing well myself. I had the bottom of the pot. You know that's what I always like.'

He insisted on seeing Pat home, though she said he must be tired and the weather was so bad. Without arguing, he put on an overcoat of his father's, and an old scarf of his own, which Mrs Baxter produced; and out they went. He took Pat's arm as they turned down the street. The wind was blowing hard, with bursts of rain, and conversation was difficult.

'Are you glad?' she asked as they turned the corner and the wind weakened.

'Glad about what?' he answered obtusely.

'Being home, of course.'

'Who wouldn't be?' He paused and tried to pin his thought down. He felt he must make a special effort to be clear in his own mind, and honest in his words, if he was going to get anywhere with the new Pat. 'In a way I don't feel I'm yet all back here. . . . Maybe so much has happened. . . .'

'Here or there?'

'I meant there, but I suppose what's happened here comes into it,

too. . . . When you've been through things with people, you don't need to talk; and when you try to explain to others, you don't even seem to know what you want to say.'

'Was it very bad?' Her voice wasn't either inquisitive or pretending to a polite sympathy; and yet he couldn't answer. How long did it take before you could answer a question like that? One year, ten years, a lifetime, never? She seemed to realise that he couldn't answer, and went on calmly, 'Here in England it's hard to remember it all ever happened only a couple of years ago. Even when there's gaps in the family or a bomb-site round the corner.' Again her detached tone, which had a hint of deeper feeling, surprised him.

'Does it do any good talking about it?'

'You might say does anything do any good.'

'Yes,' he said after a while, 'that's it, I suppose. A chap comes home. . . .' He paused again.

'He comes home,' she said gently, 'and then?'

'I don't know what he expects.'

'But he's disappointed.'

'No, not disappointed,' he replied, stubbornly sticking to his thought. 'Most ways it's better than he hoped. But he still can't. . . .' he felt the thought weighing on his mind heavily and hotly, but he couldn't utter it.

'What? Explain things? Say what's on his mind?'

Dick stopped still in the windy street, struck motionless by the burden of the unuttered thought. 'I don't know. . . . It's as if he expected to be told what it was, not to tell it. . . . Yes, and it's a sort of shock to find things the way they are, hardly changed at all, or, anyway, not changed in the way he thought.'

'What way?'

'I don't know, Pat. It all seems stupid, put like that.'

The wind howled round them again, and they walked on. A car went past, with lamps that turned the rain into a wild glittering dance, sparks and threads of silver fire. For a moment she pressed close against him, and he felt grateful. The weight began to lift from his brain. And at last she spoke, softly, and yet in that clear voice of hers that couldn't lose a hint of hardness, of self-sufficiency. 'You're feeling bad about something.'

'No, I'm not,' he said savagely. But when she made no reply, he went on, 'Yes, I am. I don't seem to fit in.'

'I thought you rather resented us all.' Then, pressing his hand, she hastily added, 'You can't talk like that when you've only been home a few hours. It doesn't make sense.'

'No, it doesn't make sense.' He suddenly felt their whole conversa-

tion unreal. 'Look, Pat, let things shake down a bit. Honest, I don't know what I'm feeling. I'm all right . . . but it's like having raw patches somewhere. When they're touched, I feel I could just give a yell and knock someone down, anyone.'

'You see,' she said in a voice that at last sounded entirely kind and gentle, 'it isn't so hard to talk, after all.'

'That's true,' he said, fighting the last of his resentment down. 'I couldn't have said all that to the others. . . . And when we started out, I didn't think I could say it to you either.'

'I know, you'd made up your mind not to. Oh, Dick, I'd like to help you, please. . . .'

He was touched and moved, but he couldn't quite respond. 'Thanks, Pat, you've helped a lot already. It'll all come out right in time. I believe that now. . . . In fact, I'm beginning to wonder what the hell we've been talking about. Just a bit of bile.'

'No, it's not that,' she said, with a note of appeal in her voice. 'It's the worst sort of bitterness to say that.'

Suddenly he realised how much they had both changed since they last walked together in the night of this town; and thought that perhaps what they were trying to talk about was that change inside them both. That was why it had come out as soon as they were alone together. 'You're a good girl, Pat,' he said, and that was all he could say. Something had locked again in his mind.

They halted on the steps of her house, and she asked him to come in and see her parents. But he apologised and said he was soaked and worn out. 'I'll come along tomorrow evening,' he said, and she leaned down for a good-night kiss. As soon as he felt her in his arms, he lost all his strained sense of separation and clasped her hungrily, and she clung to him with an abandon that she had never shown in the old days. Then she wrenched herself away, turned the key and was gone. For several minutes he stood outside the door, not because he expected her to return, but because the wind was blowing through his mind, scattering his thoughts like pieces of litter left by a holiday crowd. Till at last, smiling, he turned away and hurried home.

Next day the wind had fallen, and with it the misty rain. Blue patches straggled through the ragged clouds, disappeared, and then returned in wider stretches. Wakened by the buzzers and hooters, he lay listening to the sound of feet outside, with an odd pair of clogs clattering on the cobbles now and then. Baxter had risen early and gone off to his morning shift; and Alice had gone, too, to her mill by the time Dick got up. Mrs Baxter brought him tea and told him to stay in bed as long as he liked; and, indeed, he felt exhausted, not with physical

fatigue, but with the weight of vague burdens, vague as the misty clouds of the past day, yet distracting and crushing on the spirit. At last, however, he rose and pottered about the house, listening with half his mind to his mother's gossip. Alice, he learned, was friendly with a young man who worked for an insurance company; they weren't engaged yet, not formally, but everything was as good as settled.

'He's a bit prim and proper,' said Mrs Baxter, making a second cup of tea. 'Not that that's aught against him; and our Alice likes him as he is. A good reliable husband he'd make, I'm sure, and our Alice is a great one for wanting a place of her own, with everything just where it ought to be. But your father doesn't over-like him. You see, Joseph is an insurance clerk, and he says that no Government in Britain, no matter what, could ever dare to nationalise Insurance. And you know what your father's like about nationalisation.' She sighed. 'But Alice says he's a good tennis player and he's very keen on photography. He sends his snaps to exhibitions. You know, they're very pretty, taken through arches and things like that, and Alice always points out what lovely clouds they have. She says he waits hours till the clouds get into the right places.'

'I don't think I'll like him much,' said Dick, sprawling at the table with his cup of tea.

'Oh, you mustn't let me turn you against him. He suits Alice, and she's the one that's going to marry him, after all. I mustn't forget my own family was dead-set against your father; he was on the face then, and mother wanted me to marry one of my cousins with a green-grocer's shop. And your father never tried to smooth things down. He was a terror in those days about the Bible; he was always finding things that didn't seem to agree and asking God-fearing folk to explain it.'

Dick turned to the radio-set, but got a blast of atmospheric. 'It's having teething-trouble,' he said, and turned it off.

Mrs Baxter went rambling on with her gossip. 'You know the Blakes next door but one. Only last week they flitted between the moon and the milkman. Such a quiet couple, too, and they left hardly any debts, not more than five pounds.'

'What about the Broadbents?'

'She went to London to nurse her sister who was ill after a baby, and the three of them were killed by a flying-bomb. It made him restless. He went off to Canada in the spring this year.'

In the early afternoon Dick went for a stroll. His mother and father were as he remembered them; but the younger people, Alice and Pat, were rather like new acquaintances. Suddenly he wondered if he, too,

were changed—if the others found difficulty in recognising and getting to know him. And he realised that it mattered a lot to him what his father thought. Yes, he'd always taken his father for granted; and now he felt for the first time with a kind of detached pride how solid a character he was, how squarely set on earth.

Daniel Baxter had been elected sub-checkweighman by his fellow miners in 1919, after he'd had his leg injured in trying to save a mate from a fall of coal. He'd been an I.L.P.er in those days. Then, seven years later, old Winters had been quite incapacitated with his asthma, and Baxter was elected checkweighman as well as treasurer of the local branch of the Union. During the cutting shifts he sat beside the weighman who worked for the company, and noted the weight of the coal cut by each team. An easier job than ripping or hauling; but he deserved it. There wasn't a braver or more scrupulous man in God's Lancashire; and the checkweighman, being paid by the miners and not by the management, had to be a man like that. His independent position gave him a special function in the pit; he could say just what he thought as long as he didn't give the management a chance to say he was insubordinate. And Baxter had always kept a keen eye on what was happening around. During the war he became a member of the Consultative Committee.

They don't make 'em like that now, Dick thought, seeking to express his sense of something single-hearted, honest, magnificently four-square in the fighters of his father's generation. And yet he felt a certain resentment, knowing that his father would like him to go back to the pit. All very well; he's been working on the surface twenty-five years. The men on the face speak differently: No son of mine'll go down the pit. But he, Dick, was expected to go down to keep up his father's prestige—a sort of propaganda stunt to prove that nationalisation did mean all that Daniel Baxter said it meant.

Dick found himself walking in the direction of his friend Mike's place. The houses in that area were the poorest in the town, rows of two-roomed places with lavatories and rubbish-tins round at the side. If your house was in the middle of the row, as Mike's was, you had to walk about fifty yards along the street in front, then round the side, to go to the privy; no matter what the weather was.

Dick found the house, 29, and knocked. No one answered, so he went down to a knot of people at the farther end. Mike's reddish head stood out among the others; he was calling to someone round the corner. Half a dozen men were trying to get a timber support into place against the outer wall. Dick caught Mike's arm. 'Hallo, still shouting!'

'If it isn't Dick Baxter!' roared Mike, grabbing hold of him. 'Hey,

everyone, look what I've found.' His round face beamed. Dick, smiling in response, noticed the blue scars in Mike's nose, and involuntarily put his fingers up to feel his own.

They all clustered round, shaking hands and clapping Dick on the back. A small, swarthy miner with particularly broad shoulders, Alex, began pulling Dick over to the end house. 'Look here, lad. I come home and find the place sunk half a foot and every door and window jammed tight. And the old woman weeping because she's been visiting her sister, and there she is, shut out of her own home. Eee, give me an axe, brothers, and I'll soon be in, I will, you devil!' He let Dick go and shook his fist at the house, then took a crow-bar from one of the men who'd been shoring up the timber-supports, and attacked the front door.

'Stop him quick, before he wrecks the whole place,' sobbed his wife.

'Let me in, you devil!' yelled Alex, breaking the lock of the door and driving-in a splintered panel. He put his shoulder to the door and got it half open, then squeezed through.

'Stop him,' his wife pleaded, following him. 'He's gone crackers.'

'I knew it was coming,' said the woman from next door. 'Last week one of the panes broke in the early morning, whang! We'll be the next, I know, though the doors still come open with a good pull.'

'Ah, t' whole world's falling in,' said an old miner.

Mike took Dick's arm, and they walked off. 'I got your card from hospital,' he said. 'How are you feeling. When are you coming back to the pit?'

Dick looked round. He felt happier, more at home. The light glistening on some ragged slate-tiles, the sparrows chirpily strutting and diving around, the small girl with a peg on her nose balancing herself along the edge of the kerb . . . everything was richer and simpler and more enjoyable. He paused to look back at the subsided house, where Alex was leaning out of the upper window. In the front-room of the house by which he stood, a woman was rocking a child on her lap and singing:

*' Little Johnny Jag,
He rode a penny nag
And went to Wigan to woo-oo-oo.
When he came to a beek,
He fell and broke his neck,
Johnny, now what wilt tha do-oo-oo? '*

She laughed and tickled the baby, and the baby gurgled back. Yes, the world was a good enough place. 'I'm taking a bit of a holiday first,' he answered evasively. 'I want to look round before I settle down.'

'That's right, no harm in a holiday,' grinned Mike. 'All the same, you're back in time to be my best man and sing *The Red Flag* on New Year's dawn.'

'Who's the lucky woman?'

'You don't know her.' Mike squeezed his arm. 'She's a lass from Manchester, with blue eyes and golden hair—or near enough. My sister Letty says it's grey-green eyes and ginger hair. I wouldn't know. And she's got a good laugh, lad. I'm all for a merry heart and damn the hire-payment man. Come along to Sally-up-steps tonight, and have your health drunk. I'll tell the lads.'

'I don't want any celebrations.'

'You can't escape 'em.'

Dick pondered, 'Right-o, I'll look in. But don't you go trying to work something up.' He kicked at a stone. 'I haven't been feeling too good. The weather, maybe. But now I'm starting to think I did get out at the right station.'

'Course you did. And we'll soon show you what's what, if you need any showing.' He slapped Dick on the back. 'Ecc, but it's fine to see your ugly old mug again. I was telling my Mary all about you only last week—we happened to pass that sister of yours in the street. She had a mealy-faced chap in tow, and I'd a notion she looked the other way accidentally on purpose. Anyway, it started me off on you, and I said: He ought to be home any time now—and he'd better be! How can I get married without my best man? At a pinch I could do without the parson, but not Dick Baxter. Oh no!' He slapped Dick again. 'It's wonderful seeing you.'

On his way home Dick remembered he'd promised to call in at the butcher's and get some minced meat for his mother. There were three women ahead of him with their shopping-bags in the queue, and ruddy Mr Whitaker, presiding with chopper over his block, carried on a flow of jokes and wisecracks.

'I've had a lot of shocks this week, Mr Whitaker,' said a woman in a green coat, whose broad mare's-back blocked Dick's view.

'But instead of commiserating, the butcher jovially answered, 'The next'll be the last then?'

The woman responded, changing her tone. 'Aye, will you bring me a wreath?'

'We're collecting.'

'You'd more like put me a bit of undercut in my coffin. I'll be able to fry it where I'm going.'

'I've heard they've got arm-chairs there,' he said, cutting the gristle off a lump of fat.

'Aye, and shovels,' she took him up. 'They make you work.'
'Then you might as well stay with us here, Mrs Wright. What'll you have? What'll you have?'

Dick felt a grin settling over his face. Aye, there'll always be a Lancashire, he thought. What with meeting Mike and hearing this run of backchat, he felt as if he'd really been welcomed back home at last.

3

London

SURE ENOUGH, Tremaine lost his job on the Tottenham L.C.C. housing project. He reported for other work at the depot near King's Cross station, and was told nothing doing. So he registered at the local Labour Exchange and put in a claim for unemployment benefit. The claim was disallowed. 'When can I expect work?' he asked the clerk. The clerk yawned and turned over the pages of a ledger. Somebody called him from the other end of the office; and he got off his stool and went over. There, he leaned on a desk, fingering his tie and shaking his head. A girl clerk joined in the discussion, and he appeared more interested; he went to another desk and brought back a newspaper. The discussion went on.

'Oh yes,' he said, at last coming back. 'I thought I'd finished with you.'

'When can I expect work?'

'We don't tell fortunes, you know,' said the clerk. He smiled at the girl, who had fuzzy hair and who was getting something from under the counter. 'Still, let's see.' He turned some forms over. 'Half a dozen plasterers and fifteen tilers—all ahead of you.' He yawned again. 'It depends, of course, on a number of factors. Just keep on reporting.'

'But what about the unemployment benefit?'

'That's nothing to do with us. If you want to appeal, the Court of Referees will decide.'

At last he got Public Assistance at two guineas a week—the first money that had come his way for three weeks. Depressed and apathetic, he resisted his wife and Matt, who nagged at him to press with an appeal against suspension from work and from unemployment benefit. 'You're ready to work, aren't you?' said Matt. 'Go in and give 'em hell.'

Tremaine listened in downcast silence till Phyl joined in; then he turned on her. 'Every time I listened to your advice, I got into trouble.'

It was you pestered me into going with the squatters. All right, I blame myself. But it's the last time. We were cat's-paws, that's all.'

'Cat's-paws!' cried Phyl, so indignant that she couldn't muster her thoughts.

'Don't bother your dad,' said Mrs Tremaine. 'He's got a lot on his mind.'

'You go to your Union,' said Matt. 'What do you pay your dues for?'

So in the end he went to the offices of the Amalgamated Union of Building Trades Workers, and had his complaints taken down. But nothing happened there or at the Exchange.

Phyl, too, had her problem of unemployment. No café or shop in the neighbourhood had vacancies. She missed a job at a printing works by five minutes, and took a temporary place at a small restaurant where the proprietor's daughter was ill. At the back of her mind she was hoping for a job like Kath's, in the West End—something that would get her right away from the atmosphere of the family's worries.

One evening she met Kath at the hotel's back entrance, and they went to have tea with another of the girls, Bette, who boarded in. Bette, full of her grievances, was glad to find a stranger ready to listen. 'All found, yes, at twenty-five shillings a week,' she said, with a note of bitter jesting in her voice that made Phyl rather dislike her. She was a slim rather tall girl with slightly bulging brows and a turned-up nose; quite unlike the sleek Kath, whose face was getting a bit puffy though it still looked wonderfully smooth in a peach-bloom sort of way, and whose fringe of curls was always elaborately in place. The only part of Bette Jones that came up to Kath's standards of charm were her thick eyelashes. Phyl caught a glimpse of herself over Bette's shoulder in the wall-mirror, and thought how much prettier than Bette she was: her oval face, framed in its dark ringlets, was caught by the light just in the right angle. But she didn't like the way she was listening with her mouth half open: it gave her a stupid look. I must remember to keep my mouth closed, she thought—almost closed, so that her lips just touched and looked fuller than if she brought her teeth together. That was how she looked best, she'd decided before the glass—with her chin ever so slightly thrust forward. But Bette was vigorously stirring her tea and talking away. 'A forty-eight hour week, too, with only every second Sunday off. There's four others in the room, and you can't turn round for elbows and knees. Sometimes I wonder if men have as many elbows and knees as women.'

'I think so,' said Kath with a titter. 'I counted 'em once.'

'No chairs,' Bette went on, 'just iron bedsteads and a cracked mirror. All of us are on different shifts, so we wake one another up if

we ever do manage to drop off. Two poky bathrooms for forty girls, and a common-room up five flights of stone steps, used as a bicycle store.'

'Don't disillusion me,' said Kath, chewing buttered toast more greedily than genteelly. 'The manager wants me to live in when there's a vacant bed.'

'They like us under their thumbs,' said Bette, ordering another toasted bun. 'You come in, or you get sacked as soon as things slacken. Half my money goes on buns and tea. They took my ration-book, but I haven't had any butter or meat—unless you call those vienna-steaks and sausages meat because they smell so peculiar.'

'Why do you stick it?' asked Phyl. 'I wouldn't.' Perhaps the West End wasn't as glamorous as Kath's poses suggested. 'You never told me about all that, Kath.'

'I'm all right. Why should I complain?'

'You think you're okay because Mr Grivens pets you a bit,' said Bette, shaking a teaspoon at Kath. 'Take care, little one. He's done that before, and it didn't last.'

Kath was both pleased and displeased that Phyl heard these insinuations. 'I can look after myself. That wolf won't get much out of me.'

'Famous last words.'

Phyl began to like Bette, after all, and found she'd come up from Bristol about a year before, though she'd been born in Cardiff. Then she remembered, and got the evening paper from her bag. 'I thought this'd interest you, Kath. There's a strike at the Savoy.'

'Attaboy,' said Bette, straightening up. 'I hope they don't cave-in.'

'What about your place? Will the strike spread there, do you think?'

'It won't,' said Kath decidedly. 'You know, Bette, how much Mr Grivens is down on trade unions. One of the girls was telling me a cook started agitating six months ago, and he went out on his neck at once. Lucy told me that,' she explained to Bette.

'I don't fancy they're exactly keen on trade unions at the Savoy either,' said Bette.

She went on teasing Kath about Mr Grivens; and when Kath said that he was a married man with a photo of his wife on his desk, she replied that probably his wife had put it there—and, anyway, it didn't mean anything. 'I was cashier at a Bristol cinema, and the manager kept showing me art-photos of his wife, a real glamour-girl, too, mostly dressed in white silk pyjamas on a black silk bed. Don't ask me why, but he thought he was tantalising me or something; for after I'd seen his art-collection a few times he put the hard word on me, and so

I lost that job, too. The one thing I won't stand for is someone using the threat of the sack to get me down. If he'd used human tactics, I might have fallen; he was six feet in his socks and twice as handsome as Gary Cooper. Not like Mr Grivens, who's about as high as three-pennorth of coppers.'

'You leave Mr Grivens alone,' said Kath. 'Handsome is as handsome does.'

So they went to the Odeon, Marble Arch.

★

Tremaine, having unloaded his problems on to the Union, sat at home studying form and making caustic comments on Phyl's behaviour. Mrs Tremaine, proud in the possession of the kapok mattress, kept working out how much it would cost to buy a bed for it, and visited all the second-hand furniture shops in the neighbourhood. Her only worry was Herb, who had become more unmanageable than ever since the squatting. 'He's got a rare streak of lawlessness,' she said, 'and the Lord knows which side of the family he got it from. My grandfather was a Seventh-day Adventist, and the only thing he ever went to jail for was a refusal to pay the rates unless the Church of England was disestablished. And my father had a grocer's shop in North Shields, only he was too kind-hearted. As for my mother, both her brothers were policemen. Not town policemen,' she explained hastily. 'In the country it's different. A man can still be a policeman and friends with people.'

They were all going round to Matt's place for a party for Nell's birthday. Phyl had been told to bring a friend, and she asked Kath; but Kath had a date she couldn't postpone—with Dave, she whispered. 'I'm ever so sorry, Phyl, but you know. . . .' And she looked so serious that Phyl pretended she did know. So Phyl had turned on an impulse to the newly met Bette (they were standing at the top of the steps of Marble Arch tube-station after the Odeon) and asked her to come. I'd like to know her better, she thought. And Bette said in her best party-manners that she'd love to; she'd forgotten what an honest-to-god family-do was like.

And now Herb had vanished, just as Mrs Tremaine looked round to grab him and wash his ears. 'If you were half a father,' she said to Tremaine, 'you'd go and find him, and give him such a belting that he'd behave himself.' And Tremaine answered that he had his own peck of worries these days, and if she couldn't look after her children, she'd best admit it and not try to blame someone else.

Phyl left them arguing, and went down to the corner to meet Bette. As she loitered between the lamp-post and the entry to the sub-

terranean Ladies, Dave Whitby came up in his best American suit, and she asked him where Kath was. Dave said he hadn't seen her for a fortnight. Phyl bit her lip to stop from giving Kath away, and Dave asked her how she'd liked the squatting. 'What did you do with yourself all that time?' He stood with his hands in his pockets, manoeuvring till the lamplight fell on his sleek waved hair and bright green tie.

'There was all sorts of things to do,' said Phyl vehemently. 'I enjoyed it more than anything in all my life.' Yes, that was the truth. She wondered why she hadn't realised it like that before. 'We never knew when they'd break in and arrest us all. . . . And the man in charge, Ted King, was wonderful. And we had meetings and concerts and talked about everything under the sun.' She could see that Dave wasn't impressed. He glanced round, played with his shiny American tie, and looked down at his narrow shoes polished with bull's-blood.

'What about you and me sort of stepping out?' he asked, after giving her a critical and condescending look-over. 'I know a wizard place for dancing. Not one of the big halls where they tread all over your feet. No, this is real select, kinda night-club.'

'Nell's got a birthday-party on tonight,' she said, not unflattered at his invitation. She didn't like him much, but if she went out with him, it'd be one in the eye for Kath. 'Some other time, perhaps.'

'At your service, lady,' said Dave, and slouched off.

Phyl saw Bette on the other side of the road looking round in a lost way, and waved; and at last Bette saw her and ran over. 'I don't know if I ought to have come,' she said breathlessly, grasping Phyl's arm. 'You can't think how worked-up all the girls are getting over the strike. And the kitchen's buzzing with it too.'

'What strike?' asked Phyl, then remembered. 'But that's the Savoy.'

'Oh, is it?' replied Bette. 'We had a delegate from the Savoy strikers to tell us all about it, only an hour ago. They got posters out—*Don't blackleg*, and all that—and Arthur Lewis, he's the T.U. chap, and an M.P., too, he's in charge. They shut the door in his face when he tried to negotiate, the management did, and so the luncheon party of the American Chamber of Commerce was held up. And the Smithfield Market workers and the Covent Garden porters have given a pledge not to do anything to break the strike. A deputation of waiters went to see them, and Arthur Lewis reported it all back to a meeting behind the hotel, and they've got pickets out in the front—'

'This is where we go in,' said Phyl, only half-listening to Bette's rush of words. She felt somehow that Bette should have been more interested in the party than she was. The strike story could wait.

But Bette went on talking all the way upstairs. 'What do you think? Members of the Civil Service Association came along at five o'clock

to help and let the others go home. They had forty collecting-boxes, and the public filled 'em all. Even the head-waiters agreed to pool their pay for the strike fund. . . .

'Do you think it'll spread to your place?' asked Phyl, wondering how these events would affect Kath's position and her own hopes of a West End job. 'This is the door.' She knocked.

'I'm sure it will,' said Bette passionately.

'Don't be so sure of anything in this world of ours,' said Nell, opening. 'Come on in, and tell us all about it.'

'This is my friend Bette,' said Phyl, and mumbled something. She hadn't been told Bette's other name, or she'd forgotten it.

'Hullo, Bette,' said Nell, who was rather like a larger edition of Phyl, with smooth hair parted in the middle. Then she asked Phyl, 'Where's mum and the rest?'

'I thought they'd be here.'

'We'll give 'em five minutes, and then you'd better nip round and stop the argument.'

Nell's apartment had a tiny hall, and a bedroom and kitchen-parlour. So the girls were ushered into the bedroom, where Bill the heir slumbered in his covered cot, clutching small pudgy fists before his face; and there they took their coats and scarves off and powdered their noses. Then they went into the room where everyone was talking and smoking—Matt, bulging a bit in his best blue suit, his hair flattened with brilliantine but sticking spikily up, and another dock, Harry Thorne, a small square-faced man with close-cut hair, who bounced up and down in his arm-chair with eagerness to talk; May Shannon, fatter than the last time Phyl saw her, with dimples coming and going in her perpetual smile, and one blonde tress in the front of her otherwise chestnutty head of hair; and Robby, the wag of *The Cock*, an expert at shove-ha'-penny and tips on the dogs, with a long hairy-nostrilled nose and a deep cleft in his chin, who signalled his jokes by throwing his head back and shutting one eye—a trick devised to command attention in noisy pubs.

May, in charge of the cradle where the bottles had been put, asked the girls, 'What'll you have? Mild and bitter, or bitter and mild?'

'Have we met before?' said Robby to Bette, 'or is my life only just beginning?'

'It'd take the Yanks to invent canned beer,' said Matt. 'No, it's not right.'

'What are you so sure about?' Nell asked Bette.

Bette had forgotten, then she flushed. 'Our hotel will be out tomorrow. On strike.'

'That's the stuff,' said Matt. 'Your health, miss.'

'The women bar-attendants refused to blackleg, though they were threatened with sack on the spot,' said Bette. 'At the Savoy, I mean.'

'After this, I'll always have my mild at the Savoy,' said Robby. 'I'll send 'em a wire in the morning to reserve me a gold spittoon.'

'Grosvenor House, the Ritz and the Park Lane are all out,' said Bette, as proud as if she had done the whole thing herself. 'And the London Trades Council, and Westminster, too, have pledged support.'

'Just shows you,' said Matt, beaming. 'The last dumps of sweated labour are waking up.'

'In time to get a crack on the snout,' said Thorne, who had been both an I.L.P.er and a member of the Socialist Party of Great Britain, that splinter group of dogmatics, and who had left each party in disgust at what he called their opportunist tactics. Now he constituted a party of one-man, pessimistically opposed to every other party, Left or Right; but Matt liked him for his dogged consistency in denunciation.

Bette glanced earnestly round at the friendly faces, and seemed to draw strength from their approval. 'I'll get our lot out tomorrow, or I'll bust.'

'That's just how I feel,' said May, standing up. 'The busting part, I mean. Make way, ladies and gents.'

'You know where,' said Nell. 'Just up the stairs.'

'Give the girls some more liquor,' said Robby, 'and we'll soon be having another General Strike.'

'Oh yes,' cried Thorne, 'we'll win the Savoy and lose the world. Oh yes, the great bloody British working-class will clap itself for gaining tuppence and giving a million away to its enemies. The Savoy is out on strike and Bevin's in Paris fighting in defence of British oil-monopolies in Rumania in the name of the great bloody British working-class and its Socialist ideals.' He groaned. 'The U.S.A. is demanding a hold on the Dardanelles against the Soviet Union. It's well known that the U.S.A. borders on the Black Sea, and so we support her demands. The U.S.A. fleet is in the Mediterranean, ready to blast anyone who dares to touch the profit system, and so we support her threats to the Italian people in the name of democracy. Oh yes, our Commander-in-Chief in Greece has just flown back for further instructions about massacring the Greek people. But Grosvenor House is out. So all's well with the world, and the great bloody British working-class reads the *Daily Herald*.'

'Talks like the back of a cigarette-card, don't he?' said Robby.

'You got it all upside down,' shouted Matt at Thorne. 'If we don't start at the Savoy or Grosvenor House, or the docks or wherever we happen to be, how are we ever going to get anywhere? You go ahead,

miss. If you bring out your hotel staff, you're doing a damn sight more for the Greeks and Rumanians—not to mention the down-trodden British themselves—than all these croakers who think it's the end of the world because the United States have got to lug out their big guns. I say it's a good sign when the bastards have to throw their weight about.'

'Oh yes,' muttered Thorne, 'a good thing they're terrorising the Italians and plotting with Franco. Oh yes, a very good thing.'

'You just listen to me a moment—'

'It'll be a good thing, too, I suppose, when they start landing their troops in Britain and using us as an air-base, like they're using so many other places, eh?'

'The working class'd never stand for it,' said Matt incredulously. 'I'm no admirer of Attlee or Bevin, but you can't ask me to believe that they'd sell out to the Yanks as far as that.'

'I'm not asking you anything, I'm telling you. When it happens, you'll be so doped yourself that you'll cheer it.'

Matt roared with laughter. May, who had come back, stood with her hand on Bette's shoulder. 'You can't separate 'em. Matt looks on the bright side and Harry on the black side, and so they're as happy as two sandboys when they start yelling at one another.'

She began picking her way back to her seat. Robby spilt some beer on her foot, and said, 'I beg your pudding.'

'I never wash in anything else,' she replied. 'How did you guess?'

Then, as Nell was signalling to Phyl, the Tremaines arrived, without Herb. 'I'll wring his neck for him,' said Mrs Tremaine. 'He must be out on some proper devilry, or he wouldn't miss a party.'

Bette pressed Phyl's arm. 'I like your brother-in-law. I do wish I knew more about politics. It makes you think when you get mixed up in things. It's not like reading about it. Not that the papers ever put in anything that makes sense about a strike.'

'That's how I felt when we were squatting,' said Phyl confidentially. 'It's hard to describe . . . but suddenly you seem to see the world all different. . . .'

Bette squeezed her arm again. They didn't say anything more, but they felt close together. Yes, Phyl decided, she liked Bette, a serious girl. I'm serious myself, she decided with surprise, more or less. She'd always tried to get in with girls like Kath, who were so much cleverer with the boys and gave an impression of knowing what was what. Not out of jealousy or a wish to cash in on their good times. No, she just liked being in the thick of things, hungry for something or other. Hungry for Life. She recalled the phrase from some film. That's me. But not doing much about it. Content to watch girls like Kath having

their good times, and just waiting. Kath's good times hadn't really seemed so very good at moments, but what else was there? She'd accepted the idea that Kath was having a good time, the best of all possible times, because everyone else seemed to think that way. The newspapers, films, and all the rest of it. Naturally the good time was more a good time if you had more money to spend on it; but Kath going with Dave to his wizard night-club was doing the same thing as the Broadway beauty going with the Chicago millionaire to some gilded joint.

And now she felt outside that magic circle, sure that there could be another sort of life. And she wanted to see her face in a mirror, to look into her eyes and find out what they told her. As though all the other times she'd stared into them, doing her hair or powdering her face or putting on lipstick, she hadn't looked for the real thing, the real self whom she now seemed to have discovered for the first time. As though, before, she had looked only for the ghosts of other girls, Kath or Ginger Rogers, and now she wanted to see herself, just herself, Phyl Tremaine.

Tremaine was complaining about the Labour Exchange, the Court of Referees, the Trade Union. He suspected everyone of having a down on him for squatting. 'We was cat's-paws,' he repeated. 'But they look on us now as bad as Ted King. We're all tarred with the same brush. I might as well give up.'

Phyl wanted to come to the defence of King; but Matt told Tremaine he was lying down before he was kicked. 'And that's all bunk about Ted King. I'm a bolshevik myself, but I'm not a communist and I'll never be. I'm doing very well as I am, and I can't get out of my system that they're thinking first of Russia. But I don't mind working with 'em. They've got lots of good lads—Will ought to know Ted Dickens, eh, Harry? Though of course they've got some stinkers among 'em too—who hasn't?'

'I'm not disputing what you say, Matt,' said Tremaine, shaking his head. 'But nothing can alter the facts. I'm a marked man.'

'So am I,' said Robby, pulling open his shirt and showing a mermaid and a sea-serpent tattooed on his chest, 'but it's never done me any harm; and I've got lots more on my back.'

Thorne took an evening paper from his hip-pocket. 'Official figures. Just out. More than a thousand camps of squatters in Britain. Squatters, total thirty-nine thousand, five three five. Six hundred and thirty-three of the camps have been fitted with emergency arrangements by local authorities. Public pressure did it.'

'That's different,' said Tremaine. 'It was us who tried to take over the big houses and hotels that made the mistake. We was cat's-paws.'

'Drown it,' said Matt, giving him a glass of beer.

'Unless dad sings *A Bicycle Made for Two*,' said Nell, 'I'll dance the highland-fling and bring the plaster down on the people below—and we've had enough complaints from them already about the night Matt came home half-seas-over and knocked their milk-bottles downstairs.'

Tremaine shook his head and refused, but couldn't help smiling. Even as he refused, he began clearing his throat and preparing to sing. 'Go on, Will,' said his wife. 'You know you'll enjoy it.'

That made him protest still further, but in the end he gave in. With a smile suffusing his face, he struck up in a slightly liting voice; and it was at his wife that he directed the song. She smiled and nodded back.

4

Yorkshire

HE SAT UP in bed, looked round with a frown, and lay back again, turning his head from side to side with eyes closed. The knock came once more. He opened his eyes, but did not speak. The door opened, and his sister Joyce thrust her head into the room. He stared, still saying nothing, and she came in, with her too-too-blond hair falling over her eyes and her sky-blue kimono held in place by her right hand. 'Got any fags?' she asked hoarsely.

He stared back in distaste and shook his head. What a mess she looked, with her tumbled hair and her pale coarse skin sallow round the eyes and blotchy on one side of her neck. He hated the glazed, hard look in her eyes as she stood there biting her unrouged lips.

'Where are they?' she asked in that grating voice. 'You know you've always got some stuck away, you cold-blooded, calculating pig.'

He didn't mind her taking his cigarettes, but he couldn't bear to speak. He shook his head and turned away. She leaned over, breathing on him. She knew he wouldn't like that. And she took his face between her hands and turned it viciously from side to side. She knew he wouldn't like that either. 'Tell me, tell me,' she muttered, 'you beast.'

'In my coat on the door, fool,' he gasped. 'Let me go.'

She straightened up, panting, and clutched her kimono again. 'I'll murder you one day,' she said. 'You love tormenting me.' Her voice choked with rage and self-pity. 'Why couldn't you tell me at once?'

Why not? he asked himself. After all, he didn't care what the devil

she did or didn't do—though she might do it more discreetly. But when she came near him, he couldn't bear her, couldn't bear her eyes or her hands. He stared up at the plaster-ceiling, waiting for her to go and knowing that even if she was perishing for a cigarette she hated to go without subduing him in some way, extorting some admission. And that he was determined not to give. Somehow she reminded him of his mother as she stood there, furious on the dim edge of sight, though the pair could hardly be more different—vague and anxious Mrs Swinton, crushed and kindly, and her hard-eyed daughter always ready to assert herself against an injurious world. Only something about the mouth. . . .

'You're impossible,' she said, and turned away. He listened to her going over to the door, fumbling awkwardly at his pockets, and at last tiptoeing out. Listened with relief, and yet disappointment, as if something had been missed, unsaid, omitted. And then when the door closed, he felt a sinking of the heart, much worse than the anger and dislike provoked by Joyce's presence. The need to get up, go down to breakfast, drift through the day. Do something, make a decision that he couldn't make. He felt the pressures gathering behind his brows, and stirred uneasily, gave himself a blow on the chest, to change the direction of his thoughts and rouse himself to action. Get up, go and shave, do anything, I won't go down till he's gone.

Another knock; this time a timid one, fluttering and familiar, his mother's. He could see her face through the wooden panels, her puckered mouth, her lips slightly trembling, her frail knuckles raised for another knock which she didn't dare to give, her head leant a little sideways as she listened for any movements. He lay still, aware of his thudding heart, refusing to give a sign. He felt sorry for his mother, even sorry for Joyce, but he couldn't do anything about it. Why wouldn't they leave him alone?

He closed his eyes, but now his heart thudded so fast that he felt as if swinging in a cradle of pulsations . . . his body, the bed, the room, the whole of space swinging under the sharp beat. Suddenly he could bear it no longer.

He found himself over by the window, looking out on the wet lawn and the cypress-hedge, the arch of roses from which the last blossom had been blown. A slowly moving grey sky, an earth abandoned to a few jabbering sparrows, and someone out in the road trying to start a motor-bike. Now I've got to shave, he thought with something like despair.

He came noiselessly down the stairs, past the grandfather clock; then paused a moment, watching the pendulum, and felt eased, as if the steady, silent mechanism reassured him with its power of a

stable and orderly mechanism somewhere in the world. Besides, he was only three minutes late. The clock was really a grandfather clock: it had been bought by his grandfather, Ezra Swinton, and installed on the day of removal into the new works. All Kit's memories of the old man, it seemed, were connected one way or another with the clock of which he'd been so proud.

Mrs Swinton came to the dining-room door. So she had heard him coming downstairs, after all. 'Ah, you're there, Kit,' she said in an uncertain voice, thin and forced. At once his heart hardened, and he refused to look her in the face and acknowledge the timidly grateful smile that he knew would be lingering there. She was so glad he hadn't angered his father by being too late. So glad for both their sakes. John Swinton mustn't be annoyed; it upset his digestion. And Kit mustn't get in his father's bad books. It was so much nicer to be a happy family. Anything was nicer than the truth.

She went on into the kitchen, on pretence of hurrying something up, and Kit entered the room. As usual, the cattle of the big Academy picture, another of Ezra's proud purchases, stared at him with red glinting eyes from the sideboard mirror where they were reflected. In the glass the painting had a *coup-d'œil* lucidity that it lacked when regarded on the wall. Then the bulls slid away and Kit was looking at his father's heavy neck. Margaret was unconcernedly munching some toast, impatient to run off and meet her friend Judy at the bus-stop; but young Di looked up round-eyed from the cereals she had been stirring into a soggy mess, and watched him to his seat. As he passed, he patted Margaret on the head, knowing that she'd resent it as an indignity, a refusal to recognise her sixteen-year-old maturity; and he winked at Di, who opened her mouth a little wider. Mr Swinton punched the paper set up against the cruet, and took another piece of toast without raising his eyes.

But when his wife sidled in with a glass jar of marmalade, he gave her a disapproving glance. Instead, however, of asking her why she didn't leave such fetchings and carryings to the servants, he cleared his throat and remarked, harshly, after a quick look round, 'Where's Joyce?'

'She's not well, poor thing,' faltered Mrs Swinton, 'she's got another of those headaches.' She couldn't bring herself to use Joyce's own term, migraine. She put the marmalade down more noisily than she'd meant. It was the thick marmalade, Kit saw, brought for him. Aggie had set only the jellied stuff that Margaret liked. He refused to look up for the ingratiating smile, the pleading smile, on his mother's face. Why did she lie so feebly? And how was his father taking the lie? Both Margaret and Di wanted to know, too. They stared without pre-

tence at Mr Swinton's face—the dark flush which might have been anger or the result of eating too fast, the toast-crumbs in his clipped wiry moustache, the pin-points of fierce light in the cold blue eyes, the slightly protruding eyes. Was there going to be a scene? They waited, holding their breath.

He looked slowly round the table again. How much does he know? Kit thought. Sooner or later there'll be a really big row. He felt amused for a moment that Joyce and not himself was the one spotlighted for attack. Di swallowed her spit and choked, and Mrs Swinton, in relief, rushed round to beat her weakly on the back and beg her to breathe with her mouth open. Swinton, ignoring the diversion, settled his cold glance on Kit.

'Well, young man?' he said ironically, almost friendly.

The unexpected question, its vague and general form, broke through all Kit's defences. He reached for some toast. 'I'm going to the Library,' he stammered. Swinton regarded him for a moment with the same mixture of contempt and good-humour that his voice had revealed. He cleared his throat again and returned to the paper. He's done well out of something, Kit thought, curious and incurious, resolved not to be drawn into the world of Swinton business calculations; say what you like, he knows his stuff. Margaret pushed her chair back, muttering something, and hurried out, followed by her mother with some last-minute instructions or beseechings. Di turned her sogged cereal over yet again and took a further spoonful of sugar. Aware that his father had given him another quick glance, Kit tried to carry on with the toast as though his mind was far away—in the University Library, for instance.

★

Colin slipped as they crossed the tumbling beck, and his left leg went knee-deep into the water. Brian, with a shout of laughter, leaped for the bank, where he leaned, still laughing, against a boulder. 'The one thing I like about Colin is that he's always in character.' Kit, coming up behind, had to halt with both feet on a smallish stone; he felt one foot slipping and lifted it into the air. 'Hurry up!' he shouted.

Colin managed to slither on to the bank, holding out his hand to Brian for aid. Kit stepped on to the next stone just in time; he gave Colin a push and jumped up beside Brian. Colin fell forward on his knees and his spectacles slid down his nose. 'Don't be so barbarian,' he said with a slight stammer, rubbing his left knee. Water was oozing from his shoe.

'The trouble about life,' said Brian, 'is that it keeps repeating itself like a gramophone record with a crack. For a chap with a cult of

originality, Colin has a wonderful flair for the obvious, poor stereotyped old absent-minded intellectual that he is.'

'I have no cult of anything,' said Colin peevishly, as he removed shoe and sock. 'But at least I don't think boorishness a proof of vitality. I have no *mystique* of the *homme moyen sensuel*.'

Kit felt it was time to say a reconciling word, but he had a guilty conviction of having laughed as brutally as Brian. 'We'll get them to dry your things at the pub, Colin. I sympathise. When I was six, somebody pushed me into a pool on the Sunday-school outing—'

Brian cut him short. 'But does your pub exist? If it doesn't materialise within a quarter of an hour, you're for it. But produce some beer and I'll listen even to your obscene past or Colin's absurd present.'

'The landlady's a cheerful soul,' persisted Kit. 'She'll love the chance of mothering anything or anybody.'

'Even a sock with a hole in it,' said Brian, who had noticed Colin's efforts to hide the fact that his big-toe had come through the sock he was now squeezing dry. Colin flushed all over his thin horse-face, and Kit felt that Brian was going too far. Colin couldn't help being touchy about his poverty, living as he did with his widowed mother on her meagre annuity.

Kit tried to help Colin up, but Colin evaded him. They climbed in silence among the rocks and rusty patches of bracken turning red-gold. Brian was hurrying ahead. He moved easily, powerfully, while Colin stumbled and once fell sideways against a thorn-bush. Kit felt irritated at both of them—Brian for rushing so fast, Colin for faltering so clumsily. He wanted to catch Brian up, but couldn't leave Colin after his mishaps. 'Not long now.'

Colin grunted. A thorn had torn a small hole in his flannels, and he kept touching the spot, trying to reassure himself that it wasn't so big, after all, and could easily be mended. Brian shouted, beckoning them to get a move on and share his magnificent view. Kit lost patience with Colin and pushed on. In a few moments he stood beside Brian on a dark outcrop of millstone, looking down on the valley slopes tawny and bronze with patches of sparkling gold, and fields of soft russet that harmonised with the fading flowers of the heather on the moors above. Small scalloped clouds were strung across the pale-blue sky.

'Very pretty,' said Brian, unable to sustain any emotion for long without seeking an alibi in sarcasm. 'Come on, Colin, get your dose of cosmic platitudes.'

Colin came panting up, trying to think of some crushing profundity, but Kit pointed to the left. 'Now I know where we are. See that track over there. In five minutes we'll be outside of some beer.'

They gained the track and then a roadway. A group of young

cyclists in shorts, boys and girls, flashed past them; and then they themselves passed a close-packed flock of clip-clopping sheep, with the farmer on a sturdy dales pony of dapple-grey. And a quarter of an hour later they came on *The Unicorn* in a bend of the road running up to a small moor village. The bar with its low-timbered ceiling and red-tiled floor was empty and smelt of burning turf. Leaning with proprietary ease on the counter, Kit rapped with half a crown; and a fair-haired, plump girl with her hair tied back and falling in a large fringe over her eyes came yawning in. Kit straightened up. 'Good day, isn't your mother in? Three pints of bitter, please.'

'She's my aunt,' said the girl demurely, drawing the beer. 'And she's poorly today, thank you.'

'How's yourself?' asked Brian.

'Pretty bobbish,' she answered with a broad smile.

'Then have a pint with us.'

'I don't drink, thank you.' She gave Kit his change and went off again through the red velvet curtains.

'Been keeping her quiet, eh?' said Brian. 'Here's mud in your eye.'

Kit drank. 'First time I've seen her.'

'Then it's a free-for-all, and may the worst man win.' Brian chuckled, and nudged Colin in the ribs because he knew how much Colin disliked it. 'Keep your eye on the dark horse.'

They sat at the scrubbed-deal table beside the large turf fireplace, sprawled in a leisurely lordly way, wanting to do or say something to express their sense of release, their contempt for the world dwarfed below. But the gesture, the word, would not come. And each was thinking of the cool voice, the disinterested blue eye of the plump girl. 'I was going down a street in Cairo,' Brian began, telling a story meant to shock Colin. But it wasn't very shocking, wasn't even very interesting, and Colin refused to be drawn. He leaned back, smoking with nervous persistence, staring myopically at the low rafters stained a dark brown. And it was clear, anyway, that Brian was talking to impress the girl who wasn't there, with a vague hope she had her ear to a crack in the boards above or was peeping through a tear in the red curtains with their rim of bobbles.

Kit's mind drifted. What was he going to do, after all, with his life? And how, anyway, could one answer such sweeping questions, such ridiculous questions, in such a world? Yet it wasn't enough to carry on with an obstinate refusal to consider his father's plans. He'd have to think out some alternative—say that he wanted to write, be a poet or a novelist. And his father wouldn't regard such remarks as offering an alternative at all. He'd regard them as a mere evasion. And though Kit could put up a good case in his own mind, he jibbed at the

thought of saying to his father, 'I want to be a poet.' Not merely say it once, but repeat it endlessly, in a dull round of arguments . . . until he felt sure that the last thing he wanted to be was a poet. How could one stand up against the relentless stupidity, the interfering mania of people? And he wouldn't want me in the business even as office-boy, he thought with a sudden tensing of hatred, if John hadn't been killed in Normandy. John was the one he wanted. I was only a supernumerary, not even an understudy. He was so wrapped up in John, so sure of God's purpose in designating John his eldest-born as his successor, that he didn't even try to bring me on in reserve. He wasn't even interested enough to sneer when I wrote poetry.

'Ah, those were the days,' said Brian.

'Not for me,' said Kit. 'I hated the transport and I hated the camp, and even in hospital they put the ugliest nurses in my ward.'

'You should have been with us in Italy,' said Brian. 'Naturally it was hell, etcetera. But good company hiccuping in hell is better than a tea-party of suburbanites damned in heaven. Have you ever clasped a signorina in a Sicilian noon in a hooded carriage smelling of all the urines in the world and seething with fleas? No, then you've never lived.'

'I much prefer not to have lived,' said Colin.

Brian rose and rapped on the counter. But this time the hostess herself came bustling in. 'What can I do for you?' she smiled around. 'Nice day for a walk if you like walking.'

'We heard you weren't feeling well,' said Kit, hoping that she'd recognise him.

She yawned and rubbed her brow. 'It comes and goes, though I mostly find a bit of company does me good. But not the wireless. I like something I can answer back. I just switch it on and switch it off all day.'

'Got a job going for a tapster?' asked Brian, with a wink at the others.

'Now you're laughing at me,' she said unperturbed.

'Not as much as you'd think.'

She gave him a puzzled look and said hurriedly, 'Not that there's anything in it nowadays, what with all the regulations and restrictions and botherations. I mortally hate 'em.' She sighed, patted her bosom. 'What do you think the poor old publican gets after the government's put its hand in the till? A penny a pint, and lucky if he gets that.'

'What about the brewers?' asked Kit.

She ignored the question and shook her head. 'Aye, there's more publicans keeping pubs than pubs keeping publicans.'

'But it gives you a chance of answering back,' said Brian in mock sympathy. 'And that's what matters.'

'Well, I suppose things'll get back the way they were someday or other.' She addressed Kit, not quite sure if Brian was pulling her leg or not. 'I must say I'm sorry for the young ones who never knew the good old days. Take bacon now. The shop-cut stuff is thin as paper, and no taste in it.' She reverted to the theme of poor young people. 'They must look round and wonder why they were born—with good reason, if they only knew the truth.'

'Did you ever know the truth about why you were born?' asked Brian. 'Did you ever ask your father the necessary details?'

She gave a throaty giggle. 'He'd have said I was a gift from the Almighty. And if I'd asked my ma, she'd have slapped me.'

'Children of Darkness,' said Brian. 'Imagine the portentous moment as he turned over in the Absolute Darkness to his flattered and flattened wife—'

'Oh, I couldn't,' said the landlady, half giggling and half solemn. 'We've got to respect something or the skies'll fall on us.'

'They've fallen,' said Colin in a voice squeaky with nervousness.

The landlady lifted her hands in alarm. 'You give me quite a turn.'

'Must respect something?' mocked Brian. 'Must respect at least the genitals of our begetters, eh? Is that what religion and all the rest of the social lie come down to? Verily he is a secret god: at the door of belief in him standeth adultery.' He added aside to Colin, with a nudge, 'Nietzsche.'

Two labourers in caps and mufflers came in, and the landlady turned away with a smile of relief. They leaned on the small counter and talked in slow, low tones of the top-show last week and the prices fetched. Someone was getting rich, and it wasn't hard to guess who. But as for the others—hard up for brass as ever. 'It won't last,' said the taller one, filling his pipe. 'Everyone knows it. Didn't Tom Bowman say it out loud. I tell you this won't last long, he says, right out in the ring. Make hay while the sun's shining, he says. Yows won't gan at this price for long.'

'Aye, and did you see Will Kirby, who was near beggary ten years ago, and now he says; I'll not tak it, I'll not tak it.'

Then they started discussing the fell-races with the landlady.

'No, the sky isn't down yet,' said Brian after he had failed to regain the landlady's attention. 'But I'm always ready to lend a hand in bringing it down. Long live the revolution!' He lifted his glass and drank.

'You talk such filthy nonsense,' objected Colin. 'You don't even mean it, and that makes it worse.'

'That's what you think.' Brian scowled around. 'I mean it all right, but I'm too lazy to do anything about it. I'll tell you what. Let's pool

our resources—Kit's, I mean—and go off in a sailing-boat to the South Seas. It's an idea, isn't it?

Kit was still trying to hear what was making the landlady giggle with her hand over her mouth—probably she had loose false teeth. Brian meandered on about doing-in the Old Gang, and Colin demurred weakly, saying that Man must take refuge in Inner Values.

But at the bar there was laughter. Kit felt detached, outside it all, with his mind hovering over his slumped body, tugging away like a kite in a high wind. He moved his hand to gain the conviction of still being alive, able to exert his will. Nothing had meaning, neither the earthy jokes and comments of the folk at the bar nor the intellectual abstractions of his friends. No words were relevant. Not one of the millions of words being breathed out all over the world at that moment: a vast cataract of words, all as meaningless as a babel of starlings. . . . And yet somehow he must assert himself, must speak, or the wind would blow him away, break the shivering cord that held him to the ridiculous scene.

'Last week you said I ought to join the Labour Party.'

'Did I?' asked Brian, sitting back. 'Yes, I did. I meant it as an insult. Anyone with your formless idealism, your need of a good conscience without good works, your desire for a changed world without the courage to face what any deep-going change really means . . . Yes, that's what I meant.'

'I'm half inclined to agree with you—'

But Brian wanted to expand the theme. 'How right I was. Correctly do the gas-bag Labour leaders claim that they are the inheritors of Nonconformity. What is their parliamentary policy but the attitude of the Methodist grocer who sings hymns in the certainty of salvation, in order that he may put sand in the sugar with divine approval—just that on a national scale? Change the world without changing it.'

'No, seriously,' pleaded Kit. 'Every day I feel more strongly that I can't just settle down in the old way . . . the way father thinks was worked out by the Lord on the first day of Creation for the special benefit of Bradford. The Labour Party—I know it's a humdrum solution, but, after all, England's a humdrum sort of place. It doesn't deserve any better way out.'

Colin was breathing hard into his beer, with the white showing on his knuckles; he always took everything with such deadly lack of humour. 'I think it's a betrayal, Kit. We've got to fight for personal values. It's cowardice to join a party of any sort. We've got to fight for inward regeneration.'

'Amen,' said Brian. 'Hieronymo's mad again. *Datta Dayadhvam Damiyata*. Next please.'

Suddenly Kit felt easier. He took a deep draught of beer and smiled. Once more he was square with the scene, a breathing part of the world. Any decision was better than none—as long as it annoyed his father. 'Another round.' He collected the glasses, disregarding Colin's feeble protests that it was his turn.

'What are you grinning at?' asked Brian.

'Thinking how father would take it.'

'Take what?'

'Ah, that's the question.'

The moment he tried to say what was in his mind, he felt afraid, ashamed. Once a thing was said it became a liability. And the fact that he couldn't speak out his mind to Brian made him realise how much more difficult it would be to speak it out to his father. And yet he felt that a decision had locked inside him. He kept the smile on his face.

'Then tell the old lady to send her niece in,' said Brian. 'With or without her pants.'

5

Tyneside

WILL EMERY PULLED the drawer out carefully and stared into it a moment with a frown, half glancing over his shoulder at the door. He caught his own eye in the mirror over the chest of drawers, and was annoyed at the frown. He pressed down the small clipped moustache on either side of his upper lip, and studied his heavy, handsome face, slightly sallown, with grey eyes a little bloodshot and hair beginning to retreat over the temples. Once again he thought that the touches of grey on his dark hair gave him a distinguished note, which the clipped moustache emphasised. Looking down into the drawer, he took out a new tie still done up in tissue paper, quietly unwrapped it, and held it for a moment against his shirt. Its dark blue, with thin red lines, went well, he decided, with his blue suit and his blue white-striped shirt. Yes, distinguished, he thought. With quick capable movements he put the tie on, calling out, 'Coming.' Then he went lightly downstairs.

His nose twitched at the pleasant smell of bacon and eggs. He paused on the threshold, buttoning up his coat, and entered the kitchen. Jean blew her red hair out of her bright blue eyes, and stood looking him up and down, clear-faced and stocky in build, with the frying-pan in her hand. 'I thought you'd be down prompt when one of your blessed eggs was waiting for you—though it's a shame to go frying an egg as fresh as that one was.'

He narrowed his eyes and checked himself, 'Where's yours?' he asked.

'Ach-och,' she replied in cheerful chiding tones, 'if I take it into my head to give the egg to Maisie Robson, it's no use you fashing yourself about it. It's gone, and no power in heaven or earth will bring it back again, saving a stomach-pump. Besides, the poor woman's with child again, and hasn't had an egg for weeks. Not every woman has so clever a man as I have, the Lord be thank for small mercies.'

His face darkened, though he tried to control his anger. 'You did the same last week.'

'No, you're wrong there, Willie,' she contradicted him with provocative brightness. 'It was Ellen Timson that time. And is it a sin, tell me, to give a black-market egg away?'

'There was nothing black-market about it'

'Aye, that I know full well.' She stood with hands on her broad hips, small, pugnacious, with smiling wrinkles round her eyes. 'It was given you by the Angel Gabriel personally as a testimony of his high esteem. And maybe he laid it himself' She laughed. 'If an angel's got wings and no difference of male and female, as I once heard the preacher say, why shouldn't he lay as good an egg as the draggilt old hens that Mrs MacDougall keeps.'

He pursed his lips. 'You talk as coarse as a tinker sometimes, Jean.' He turned to his food.

'You've laughed at it loud enough in your day, man,' she answered, going over to the sink. 'And in your night, too.'

'There's a time and a place for everything.'

She saw him reflected in the old mirror hanging at one side of the window, and turned round. 'I thought there was something queer about you this morning, but I've only just noticed it's the new tie you've got shining round your neck. Aren't you a great one for fancying yourself these days?'

'It pays a man to look neat,' he said angrily and argumentatively. 'How long do you think I'd hold down my job if I didn't take a bit of trouble with myself?'

'I didn't know you found it a trouble,' she said. She turned the water on full strength and drowned his reply. He gave up, cutting off the last bit of rind from the bacon. He swallowed hard, automatically fingered his tie, and then flushed darkly with irritation. Turning off the tap, she looked round with that coarse laugh which now grated on him. 'Well, at least it isn't as bad as the one Jemmy Dent had, a naked woman and all, picked out in luminous paint. His ma found it under the mattress, and she burned it in the grate at once, even though he said he'd won it from a Yank sailor.'

He ignored her. Now that the tie had been noted and insulted, he felt better, and the slight hang-dog note left him. 'You talk more tomfoolery every day, Jean,' he said magnanimously. 'More tea.' After a pause, he added, 'Please.'

'A bit overbrewed,' she commented. 'But it's tea, and that's the main thing. I'm becoming a tea-soak. Do you know, I drank so many cups waiting up for you last night, I had to get out of bed three times—and don't say you heard me. You were snoring like a bull.'

'Can't you talk of something else at breakfast?'

'All right, Willie, I'll keep it for dinner-time—though I could never make out why a body's so loath to speak of things that gave a deal of pleasure in the doing.' Her stomach rumbled and she slapped herself in the middle. 'Keep quiet in there, can't you? You'll be upsetting this meek and mum husband of mine.' The rumble returned. 'Don't you go answering me back, you low blettering hussy.' Then, with a sudden change of mood, she moved over to the table and sat opposite her husband, resting her face in her hands and staring at him. 'What's wrong, Willie? Are you really getting genteel in your old age, or is it something else you can't bring out?'

Emery sat back, tilting his chair a little and glanced round the kitchen to escape her keen, humorous eyes. There was no reason for complaints: everything was tidy, and though at the moment Jean was carelessly dressed (with her hair all over the place, and her blouse, open down the front, pushed anyhow into her skirt) she'd be trim enough by the time she went out. But there was something in her that just didn't seem to care; she wouldn't take things seriously, she didn't appreciate the fight he was putting up to better their position. . . . He calmed his rising wrath, he didn't want to start another of the disputes that never got anywhere. He looked at his wrist-watch: only an hour to drive to the office, pick up some papers, and get across to the other side of Newcastle. 'There's nothing wrong,' He stood up.

'You don't enjoy life the way you did, Willie,' she went on. 'It's all spit and polish nowadays.' She waved his protest away. 'I don't mean your taking a pride in your clothes. It goes deeper than that. You're getting like that aunt of yours who couldn't sit still if there was a single dirty teaspoon in the house. Only, it's more than washing-up that frets you. It's everything—'

'You don't grow with the times,' he said briskly. 'Don't you understand what's happening? Don't you understand how important it is for me to keep my end up?' He banged his fist on the table, surprising himself with his vehemence. 'We've got to make 'em respect us. We've got to make 'em meet us on equal terms.'

'So we buy a new tie,' she said in even tones, still holding her head

in her cupped hands. 'And they notice we're their long-lost brother. They don't want profits any more, they say, and the stewards can run the factories.'

'That's sarcasm, I suppose,' he replied thickly, 'and you think it's funny. But I tell you we'll beat 'em, and it won't be the stewards——'

'You didn't say that when you worked at Clayton's.'

'Why don't you wash your ears out? I'm saying nothing against the stewards. I'm only saying that we're on top now, and the keywork isn't theirs, and it can't be. Other times, other methods,' he quoted with a slightly pompous note.

'I'll say so.' She rose too. 'You needn't run that gramophone record. I know how it goes, and it's getting scratched. But before you go, there's something I must mention.' He turned back from the door and she went on, 'Joe Bailey looked in yesterday and said he hadn't seen you for donkey's years. What about going round next Friday, he said. It's his brother Ned's birthday or something—anyway, Ned's won fifteen pounds odd in the Pools, and they want to have a do. Bring Willie along, baritone and all, he said; haven't heard him give us *Keep your feet still, Geordie hinney*, for a month of Sundays. He's busy, I said, being the good wife and shielding my man. All the same, what about it?'

'If I can manage it. But you know I can't tie myself down too far ahead nowadays.' He fingered his tie again, and then something in Jean's eyes made him frown and add, 'Next Friday? I think it'll be O.K. I'll make a special effort.'

'Don't hurt yourself,' she murmured.

He turned away in speechless anger; but forced himself back. 'We've had some good times when we were hard up, don't let's spoil it all now because things are easier.' She nodded and he gave her a good-bye kiss. 'Next Friday then.' He went off with mingled relief, resentment, and self-congratulation on his self-control. He hated to leave in the morning in the middle of a quarrel. Disquieting memories, rearrangements of the conversation with himself delivering all the crushing repartees that had failed to come up at the time, impulses to get back and finish things off effectively—such dregs of the incomplete clash kept on mixing acridly with the later events of the day. Well, he thought with a smirk, I didn't manage that too badly; there's one thing, a T.U. official does learn patience and long-suffering; but Jean is really getting too complacent. We'll have to have a proper show-down soon.

She heard the bang of the front door, went over again to the sink, and stared through the window with a brooding air. Her stomach rumbled, but she paid no heed. Sighing, she lowered her head, and her

hair, coming undone, fell over her face. Hairpins tinkled on the basin in the sink. Then, as she tossed her hair back, the back door opened and a young girl of about seven years dashed in, with a tight plait sticking out on each side of her thin bony face.

'Eee, Mrs Emery, my mother says have you got any sugar, and two aspirins, if you can spare 'em. She'll pay you back at the end of the week. And something else, what was it?' She patted herself on the open mouth as she tried to remember.

'The electric iron? No? . . . But why aren't you at school, Elsie?'

'A screw of salt,' said the girl triumphantly, jumping up and down. 'And can you come in between eleven and twelve to munt the bairn, because I've got to go to the dentust.' She opened her mouth wide. 'Look, can you see. It isn't growing straight. And I'm going to have a sundae afterwards.'

'I'll be there,' said Jean. She took a packet of sugar from the cupboard, started dividing it, and then handed the whole packet to the girl, who clutched it to her bosom. 'Here's a bottle half full of aspirins, and some biscuits for yourself. Tell your ma I'll come as soon as I've washed up the breakfast-things and got myself decent.' She bent down. 'Now give me a kiss and repeat what I said.'

★

He always felt depressed nowadays if he had to visit North Shields where he'd been born; and he made a detour rather than go near the street where his father had had the greengrocer's shop, or the foul little cottage where he'd been brought up by his uncle after the events which a kindly jury described as 'overdose taken during great anxiety of mind' by his insolvent father. The uncle had been a hearty drunken old fellow who had wanted his nephew to get on in the world, and yet in the end almost hated him for doing so. Behind the lad's back he boasted about him to friends, but to his face he told him off as a conceited ninny. 'Nobbut a kangry gawk,' he'd say. 'That's a' you are. You're daft nowt, you divvent knaw enough to come in out of the rain.' And Will Emery had wanted his approbation more than anything on earth. Then the old man had died after a stroke, still refusing to recognise his nephew's worth and singing *The Collier's Rant* in a voice of quavering fury.

Emery saw someone whose face he knew. Clayton, whose father had owned the works where Emery had been apprenticed and where he had been a shop-steward when he got the sack. Clayton, who now owned the works, a busy go-ahead chap with his finger already in several other pies. Emery had met him a few times on official matters in the last three years, and Clayton had always been extremely amiable,

too amiable in fact. But he didn't want to meet him today, especially without his car. He turned and looked into a tobacconist's window for a while, wondering if he'd treat himself to a new pipe. Next time he meant to buy a really good one.

He crossed the road and walked on, his mind returning against his will to the old days in North Shields, and then switching off to Jean. It suddenly struck him that there was a certain likeness between his relations to Jean and his relations to Uncle Amos in the past. She, too, had wanted him to make the best of himself, and yet now she kept resenting his rise more and more; recently things had threatened to become intolerable. She was a stick-in-the-mud, he told himself, and so had been his uncle, damning all machinery as a devil's invention to tear the guts out of the workers. And now Jean seemed to think he, Will Emery, ought to have gone on slogging away in the shop and not take the chance of an administrative job. As if I'm not doing everything I can for the chaps at the bench, he thought resentfully.

A hand fell on his shoulder, and he started. 'Thought it was you, Emery,' said Clayton in his brisk clipped tones. 'Excellent. Going back to your office? Well, what about letting me drive you? I'm going that way.'

Emery wanted to refuse, but at the same time he was pleased at Clayton's manner, which assumed an equality of some sort between them. And he didn't want to take the tram; he had grown used to his car. 'Right-o, thanks. If it's all the same to you.' He kept explaining as Clayton led the way to the side-street where his car was parked. 'My car's at the garage. It suddenly developed a hollow sort of noise, though it was running as smooth as ever.'

'Sounds like a fault in the exhaust system.'

'Yes, I looked at the silencer and the exhaust-pipe junctions. They'd come loose. So I've had to go round under my own power today.'

They got into Clayton's Humber, and as they moved down the road, Clayton remarked casually, 'It's an Austin, isn't it? I've seen you a few times in it. I've got a good memory for cars. . . . The Union buys the cars for you chaps, doesn't it?'

'Yes,' said Emery, irritated.

'Jolly good of them, I think. And you pay back in your own time? More or less.'

'You don't mind my questions, do you? I always like to know how things work. Just tell me off if I start asking about something I oughtn't to. I give that warning to all my friends.'

Emery was mollified by that semi-apology uttered in Clayton's frank, airy tones. 'Anything else you want to know?'

'Oh, lots.' For a few moments he drove in silence, then he said, 'You're a pipe-man, aren't you?' He pulled a pouch out of a pocket of

his dark-brown tweed suit, and tossed it into Emery's lap. 'Try this. No, I want your opinion. It's a blend I've had made for me. Some chaps think it's a trifle too hot.' He waved his hand to a passer-by as they halted for a moment at some traffic lights. 'I don't need to ask why you've been down our way. Must say I can't understand the mood of the men. Nowadays nothing seems to satisfy them.'

'Well, the times have changed. The men have had a taste of better things, and they like it. When you like a thing, you want more of it.'

'That's true enough of some people.' Clayton spoke a little more slowly than usual, as if weighing his words. 'I can't imagine you or me sitting on our backsides just because we'd got a fairly safe job and a threepenny rise. But most of the workers in question would have sold their souls twice over before the war for the jobs they've got and the beer they swill now. That's my opinion, anyway,' he added with a note of deference, handing the subject over to Emery for his comment.

'I don't agree. They wanted a job and some beer, aye, but it wasn't all they wanted. And now they want more, a lot more.'

'Sure you're not just talking about yourself? After all, you're not in the same street now. You've shown 'em what a man can do to better himself if he's got the brains and guts.'

'I'm not exactly front-page news yet,' said Emery, smiling against his will. 'And you mustn't forget that I'm the servant of these men. If they turn me down, I'm back where I started.' He had meant to make this statement lightly, but he couldn't hold back a note of grimness.

'Yes, it's all down in the little book like that,' said Clayton with a quiet, friendly guffaw. 'But don't tell me that you've been clever enough to get where you are, and yet you'd be fool enough to go back, as you say. You know better than me how many ways you can dig yourself in.' He paused, and Emery wanted to interrupt and tell him that he didn't understand trade-union democracy, but some inner conflict, which he could not clearly grasp, kept him silent. What's the use of arguing? I'll just wait and see what this shrewd bastard is up to. Clayton changed gears and continued, 'Within five years you'll be in the Executive. Believe me, I know a coming man.' He waited a few moments and then remarked, 'But we were talking about the workers.'

'You were.'

Clayton laughed, as if he was delighted at being caught out, and congratulated Emery on his quick wit. 'All the same, what's your opinion?'

'I haven't got an opinion in the sense you mean. I'm part of the machinery of arbitration—or of defence, if need be.' He suddenly decided to reverse their rôles and move into the attack. 'You've been selling scrap-iron to Franco.'

'I do a bit in that line, but you know it's not my main business.'

Don't tell me the Union is going to make trouble because someone like myself does a perfectly legitimate bit of business! You write to the Board of Trade and hear what they have to say of exports.'

Emery had the feeling that Clayton was a trifle rattled. 'I didn't say any such thing, but I'll give you my personal opinion. I only wish it was possible to take Union action about what you're doing. Do you remember how we organised a collection for the crew of the *Stanleyville* when they refused to take scrap-iron to Japan in 1933?'

'I thought you'd have given up that sort of hot-air. After all, when a man gets to a responsible position, he realises what is possible and what isn't—what really helps him to his objective, and what's merely window-dressing.' He laughed again. 'You were always an obstinate chap. You remember that little strike you led?'

'It was a lock-out.'

'What's in a name? I was fresh to the place then, just looking on and watching how dad handled things. But I remember you quite well.'

'I'm flattered. But I didn't lead the men. True, I was on the strike committee, but Fred Grainger and Bill Midford were the leaders. They were old-timers, and I was just getting the hang of things.'

'All the same, it was you my father pointed out. "He's the one to get rid of," he told me.'

'I wasn't got rid of so easily.' In recalling those old struggles he had withdrawn again from Clayton, he felt a bitter resentment of the man and his easy manners, his tweed-coated assurance, his obvious belief that he could win Emery over with a few sugared words. 'It's a fact,' he went on, choosing his words. 'It's a fact that being a Union official does sometimes get a man out of tune with the workers he's serving. But then he's only got to meet a few employers like you, Clayton, and he knows what he's up against. I can tell you, if I'd still been in your shop, I'd have got strike-action over that shipment to Franco, or I'd have given up the ghost.'

'You'd have given up the ghost, Emery. Think twice. The times have changed, you said a while back. When you were in my shop, you'd have bartered ten years of your life for the power you've now got. Well, you've got it, and you'd bring the full weight of the Union down on any hot-headed fool in the shop who tried to engineer an unofficial strike about my perfectly legal exports.'

Emery didn't answer for a while. When he did answer, the energetic protest had gone out of his voice. 'I still feel the way I said.'

Clayton laughed tolerantly. 'You're all right, Emery. By the way, does the trouble up at Blyth come under you?'

'No, that's well off my beat.'

'What's your opinion of it?'

'I've just told you, I don't know any of the details. It's not my concern.

'I won't believe that you, a T.U. official, approve of unofficial strikes under a Labour Government.'

'Naturally I don't approve of them,' said Emery, still uncertain whether he felt more annoyed or pleased at Clayton's insistence that in the long-run they were both good fellows more or less on the same side. 'But that doesn't mean I take a cut-and-dried attitude to the issues involved. The men don't go off the deep-end for the fun of it.'

'Aw, you're all right,' Clayton chaffed him. 'Where do you want me to drop you?'

'Anywhere near Market Street will do.'

Clayton turned on the car-radio, and a sharp female voice broke eerily in upon them. Clayton turned it off. 'My wife had the thing put in. Can't say I fancy it.' Then, as they were drawing up near the kerb. 'I say, if you're doing nothing, come and have a coffee. No harm in meeting a few of the lads.'

Emery was going to refuse, but he thought the smile on Clayton's face anticipated a refusal, and was ready to put it down to fear, gaucherie, inability to mix with men of different political views. Besides, he wasn't keen to get back to the office and its perpetually ringing telephone.

'I can spare a few minutes,' he said, consulting his watch.

As they moved down the street, Clayton took his arm. 'I hear you're looking for a new house.'

'Who told you that? I've hardly mentioned it to anyone.'

'Who was it? I forget. But you know what this town is for things getting round. I don't suppose you want a very big place. Big houses are burdens nowadays. Still, nothing like a roof of your own. I know a house that might suit you. You want to buy a place of course.'

'I'm not sure.'

'Nonsense, of course you do. Nothing like real estate nowadays.'

'Where is this place you mentioned?'

'I'll run you out one afternoon. It's High Heaton way—belongs to a friend of mine who must go south.'

They went into the stuffy, heavily furnished restaurant. I may as well have a look at the house, thought Emery. I can't bear Byker any longer. Its massed grey houses seemed crushing him down: jamming together and toppling over to sweep him down the cobbled ways to the shipyards and engineering works that littered the banks of the Tyne. Somehow it had now come to emblematisé everything he disliked, all his fears of failure and defeat. The Union-election earlier in the year had been hard-fought, and though he had won fairly easily,

his margin had narrowed. Ever since then he'd been haunted by the dread of losing his job, of failing in time to notice and grapple with all the intrigues and campaigns against him. Byker had come to stand for these hostile pressures and factional tricks. What he wanted, above all things, was stability, and a house of his own in a quiet suburb would help him to dig in. Dig in? Who had lately used that phrase?

But before he could remember, he was being drawn towards a table by the fireplace where three men sat. One of them he slightly knew, Gilchrist, a manufacturer of sweets, mainly toffees of various sorts. Clayton introduced the others: Major, a stumpy man with heavy eyebrows, a small exporter, and John Raper, a lean angular man. Yes, Emery recalled that he knew Raper, too; they'd met at the Town Hall. Raper was on the Watch Committee.

Clayton ordered coffee and Emery offered cigarettes round. 'Well, what were you chaps plotting?' Clayton asked, choosing rather to underline than ignore the breaking-off of an animated conversation. He winked at Emery. 'Come on, out with it.'

'I was just saying that we could do with a statesman like Smuts in Britain,' said Major, turning over the pages of his *Daily Telegraph*. 'Have you seen his speech calling for a bloc of the Western Powers against the Soviet Union and its satellites?'

'You can't say Bevin isn't taking the same line,' said Raper in an ungratifying tone, with a glance at Emery, as if to say: You see how broadminded we are; we're quite ready to admit there are good men even in the Labour Party.

But Gilchrist gave one of his coarse laughs. 'We weren't talking politics at all, nor business either.' He waved a fat hand at Emery. 'Just lean a little closer so the waitress can't hear. It's Alderman Sessford we were talking about.'

'I hear he's having a bit of stomach trouble,' said Emery, wanting to show he wasn't altogether ignorant of events in the civic sphere.

'Stomach trouble,' cried Gilchrist, choking and heaving with laughter. 'That's a good one. That's the best I've heard for years. Stomach trouble!'

Clayton banged him on the back. 'Come on, out with it!'

Gilchrist subsided, wiping the tears from his reddened eyes. 'You know old Sessy has been chasing the barmaid at *The Spread Eagle* for months. Mabel's her name and Mabel's her nature. The one with the figure like a cask. In the summer she had a dress with red rings round it, and Jack Timson said to me: "The barrel's been re-hooped".' He started heaving again, but controlled his merriment. 'Well, old Sessy had his way in due course, and Mabel began to find out what a mean old rogue he is. So she took steps accordingly. One day when he was

up in her room, wide to the world under the combined effects of rum and Mabel, a friend slipped in and took a photo. You can imagine what a shock old Sessy got when Mabel produced it and said someone was threatening to send copies to the Lord Mayor, the Home Secretary, the preacher at old Sessy's chapel, Mrs Sessford and the half-dozen Miss Sessfords into the bargain. He began heaving again. 'You should have seen that photo. Mabel showed me.' At last he wiped his eyes clear again. 'Well, what could old Sessy do? He paid up, but you can imagine the shock to his system. Of course he's got stomach trouble.'

They all laughed. 'Ah well,' said Raper, rising, 'we all make mistakes sometimes, and it'd be a pity if a man to whom the city owes so much should end in the shadows.' He nodded to Emery. 'Sorry to rush away, but I've got a committee meeting.'

'Fellow feeling,' said Gilchrist, with a heavy leer when Raper was out of the restaurant. 'I suppose he was thinking what it cost him to hush up that little matter of the choir-boy.'

'You're a sewer of reminiscences,' said Clayton. 'You'll be giving our friend Emery here a jaundiced idea of the morals of our city fathers.'

'Oh, Sessford and Raper are all right,' said Gilchrist. 'They just happened to miscalculate. They're no worse than the others.'

Clayton turned to Major. 'Emery objects to our trading with Spain.'

'Where does he want us to trade with then? Russia?'

Somehow Emery couldn't summon up again the indignation which had overwhelmed him in the car. 'Luckily I don't have to formulate the policy of the Board of Trade.'

Clayton nodded with approval. He took up the *Telegraph*. 'Look here, Major, the government has to decide what to do with the radioactive by-products of atomic energy. Well, what does it do? It hands the packing and distribution over to Thorium Limited, in which the I.C.I. hold half-shares. That's the sort of socialism I like. If Churchill had done it, think of the outcry. Attlee does it and everyone agrees such a step is for the good of the nation.'

'Wait till we've nationalised steel and the insurance companies,' said Emery, smiling, but meaning his words as a threat.

'I'm waiting,' said Clayton, 'and I don't mind how long I wait.'

They all laughed, Emery with them. After all, he felt, they're all Tynesiders like myself, tough fellows who need a bit of watching, but estimable in their way when you got to know them. The great thing is not to get rattled and to have a sense of humour. He took the cigarette that Major offered him.

II *Decisions and Half-decisions*

6

Lancashire

HE KEPT ON blaming the bad weather: dull or rainy week-ends, rain or wind on the nights when he arranged to meet Pat. He had meant to have things out with her, but after that conversation on the first night they found it difficult to come again to the point. Each waited on the other. And the more they delayed, the more he resented the need for a discussion at all. What was it that they had to discuss? Do I love you? Do you love me? Do we love one another? All that seemed soppy and pointless. Do you want to marry me? Do I want to marry you? Things couldn't be put as bluntly as that—or could they?

His acceptance of the situation worked all right until they were left alone—in the park at night, in the streets when he took her hand. They felt shy then, and sooner or later something definite would have to be said. He kissed her, and she closed her eyes; she was comfortably there, in his arms, but a certain passivity had the effect of resisting him, of holding them both back from the full intimacy that would have compelled a decision. A decision to speak plainly and frankly until the ache of vacancy, the vague but persistent fear, were ended. Or a sudden rapture wiped out the need for explanations and simply restored the need for each other's bodily presence that had held them in 1943.

Once, on a seat in the park, on their way back from the cinema; he clasped her with something of the old insistence. She trembled and seemed to pull away; then sighed and gave way inside his arms; and the old unquestioning desire had risen up in him. He leaned over her in a long kiss, which ended with her struggling away for breath, and it seemed as if she gave a low laugh. He passed his hand restlessly and masterfully over her body, and said hoarsely, 'Pat. . . .'

Two pairs of youngsters came round the bushes at the corner and went on with their noisy mixture of skylarking and courting. One of the boys bent down to do up his shoelace, and his girl pushed him over. He caught her by the ankle and brought her down, too. 'Did she fall or was she pushed?' asked the other boy. The girl on the grass was squealing, trying to pull down her very short dress. 'Oh, now you've made me lose my penny!' 'What penny?' 'The one holding my stocking up.' 'All right, I'll take your stockings off.' 'You find my penny.' 'You're sitting on it.' 'Keep your big hands to yourself.' 'I thought

you wanted your penny back.' They went searching in the grass, pushing one another over and squealing.

Pat rose without a word, and they walked on. He felt depressed—lost. She made no reference to what had happened, and that made things worse. He felt embittered, as though she had been responsible for the inroad of tumbling youngsters, and resolved that it wouldn't happen again.

And yet at moments he felt very close to her. He found himself able to tell her a little about his war experiences: nothing of importance, but the small amusing details that kept coming up in his thoughts, in the contrasts of civilian life. When, however, she tried to respond with comments about things occurring in the war factory or at her present job, he felt repelled. And if she went on to talk about her employers and their various clients, generally rich mill-owners or landlords, he chafed and had to hold himself from becoming heavily sarcastic. Once he said, 'You've gone up in the world.'

She was silent, then remarked, 'But I only work there.'

He met Alice's semi-engaged youth, and disliked him as bumptious and stupid. But in his mood of critical withdrawal, he was careful not to argue. Later, Alice challenged him. 'I can't say I like him,' he answered. 'But what's the odds?'

'What's wrong with him?'

'If you don't see it, it isn't there.'

'You don't like him. All right, I'll marry him just to spite you.'

'Shurrup, you two,' said Mrs Baxter, looking up over her knitting. Alice banged her iron back on the range and turned the blouse on the ironing-board. 'Agree to disagree,' said Baxter, drawing his spectacles down his nose and settling back in his armchair. *The Freethinker* and the local newspaper lay on his lap. "I detest your point of view, but I'll defend to the death your right to hold it." The noblest words of man. Can you find anything as good in all the Pauls and Peters, Matthews and Johns? You can't.

'Don't try to influence their minds,' objected his wife, who was a Unitarian and stuck to her chapel principles, her one point of steady resistance to her husband. 'I thought you always said they should be left to find the truth of things out by themselves.'

'The truth; what is the truth?' He chuckled. 'Ah, Mister Pontius Pilate had you there. The only one you can respect as a man of intellect in the whole thing.' Then, catching her eye, he chuckled again. 'I'm sorry, mother. Yes, let's agree to disagree. That's more than the Churches can do.' He put *The Freethinker* behind him, and settled down to read about the rates dispute, a lad two streets away fined for

no lights on his bicycle, a house burgled by an unemployed engineer, a woman jailed for beating her four-year-old son, black-market thefts of cigarettes, an old-age pensioner who'd hanged himself under the stairs, a building contractor sentenced for indecent exposure in the park rockery ('Give a dog a bad name and he's always blamed,' he said in court), disappearance of a van full of bacon ('the police expect shortly to make an announcement'). . . . *The Freethinker*, he thought, I'll keep for an intellectual wrestle over the cocoa, I hope there's a bash at the bishops in this week's editorial.

Mrs Baxter sighed and realised that she'd dropped a stitch. Alice picked up the heated iron, held it sideways, and spat at it. It hissed back at her, bubbled, and dried up. Catching her eye, Dick made a hissing noise, in imitation of the iron and went up to his room.

They talked about a trip to Fleetwood or Manchester, or up on to the moors, if a good week-end turned up; but did nothing about it. He felt the gap between himself and Pat widening, and yet they got on well enough together. Her cool neatness he admired and yet found irritating; it seemed part of the force, whatever it was, that cut them apart. She always sat straight up, with her shoulders drawn a little back; the attitude threw her chest out, and her breasts, small and definite, were carried with a certain self-conscious aggressiveness. There was something self-contained about her, he'd have called it coldness if he didn't remember 1943 and the night in the park before the rowdies came along. Yet she seemed to want their undefined relationship to go on; she ignored, but did not contradict, an insinuation made by Alice about their coming marriage. Does she really want me? Or is it pride, obstinacy? Or what?

Then he asked himself: Do I really want her? Was it a memory, or a hope, or mere pig-headedness that kept him going with her? He tried to imagine married life; but couldn't get past the picture of her in a white marriage-dress and veil, looking even more cool and assured. . . . And, anyway, the idea of marriage only made her seem more remote. Then at moments he felt there was nothing wrong between them; what was hurt and angry inside himself had no relation to Pat at all, but came from experiences which he could not, or would not, bring up into his mind. When he reached this point, he felt a heavy lassitude come over him, and he sat inert at the window of his room or on a seat in the park.

Also his indeterminate mood was helped by the general agreement that he was on a holiday. Sooner or later the holiday would end, and he would come back into everyday life, into the life of the others. For the moment he was a privileged being. A lonely traveller seeking to

cross the rickety bridge between army-life and the workaday world in a way that had the effect of making the bridge grow longer with every step he took.

They went one Saturday to Manchester. During the train journey Dick was withdrawn. He didn't like talking in a train, anyway, and he had done so much travelling over the last four years as a soldier that he felt a bit strange on a civilian pleasure trip—especially as two lads in Signals battledress got in at Wigan. But he grew animated again when Pat went busily moving along the shops of Market Street and its area—British Home Stores, Lewis's, Marks and Spencers, and the rest. Here they were part of a vast crowd of other people, women with prams, lovers, newly married couples, all making the same round of the shops. The only thing that upset the emotion of absorption into the civilian routine was the sight of the bomb ruins, the warehouses of Piccadilly flattened along three sides. He wanted to talk about the destruction, but didn't know what to say. Rain caught them, and they had lunch in a gloomy tiled restaurant—fried fish and chips, sultana pudding, and a cup of tea—at half a crown each. Over the tea they discussed where they'd spend the afternoon, and came round to the idea with which they'd begun—a visit to Belle Vue. So out they went, and took a tram from Piccadilly Gardens (still covered with surface shelters), and spent some four hours wandering up and down garden paths, dodging rain, looking at parrots, lions, and monkeys in the Zoo, and trying some of the milder amusements of the Fun Fair. Then back to Oxford Street and cinema-land. They decided against another gloomy tiled restaurant and had tea in the Odeon Café, where they discussed whether to go to the cinema or a variety show at the Palace.

'Is George Formby on?' . . . 'No, but there's that chap who does the two women talking over the garden fence. I like him, don't you? . . .'

But they went into the luxurious vast darkness of the cinema. Dick took Pat's hand, but after a while forgot that he held it. When they at last emerged, somewhat dazed, he realised they'd have to hurry to the station—unless they meant to go by a slow night train and walk the last part of their journey. He took Pat's arm and said they'd have to rush. She seemed still lost in the film world, and merely smiled. 'Would it matter so much?' And when he questioned this remark, so casual for her, she smiled again and said, 'I don't know. I suppose I meant I could stay with my Aunt Amelia, she's always asking me to come.' Then she pulled herself together. 'But of course, she wouldn't be expecting me. Yes, let's rush.' They caught the train and drownd through the journey home. Once or twice he saw her half-smiling with closed eyes and was curious, till he thought how anything in the day's sights, from the gibbering monkey to the film about goings-on

on the Campus of some U.S.A. University (which seemed to have curricula of football, dances, and petting-parties), might have provided the material for her smiling reverie.

His father gave him counsel in which his own hopes were veiled by generalisations. 'Use your head, lad. It's the use of right reason that sets everything on the safe track, man or nation. Think it out.'

'There's nothing to think out,' said Dick, deliberately blank.

Mrs Baxter interposed, addressing her husband, 'It's a pity you never used your right reason and found yourself a better job. And you might try to think of your own young days while you're about it. What would you have thought if some old chatterbox had sat talking to you that road?'

'I chose a grand trade and a grand woman,' Baxter replied. 'I don't see how that gives you the right to say I never used my reason.'

'Ah, now you're flattering,' she said 'You know you need crutches for a lame tale.'

Baxter shifted on to another favourite theme. 'The trouble is that nowadays youngsters have things made too easy. When I look back on the hard fights we had to build up the Union and snatch a crumb of justice for ourselves, I can't help thinking how it all fell into your lap, Dick. And it was harder still in my dad's time. When they handed in strike notices, they got eviction orders the very same day. But they struck. I remember it all myself. Now with our government come to stay and the mines nationalised, you youngsters are set for life. And most of you go on as if things had always been the way they are.'

Dick didn't answer. His mother glanced anxiously at his face. 'Don't frown so much, Dick. You'll be looking old before your time. And that comes fast enough.'

He only realised how much he disliked Alice's Joseph when he and Pat, Alice and Joseph all had tea together one evening before the cinema. They were having a three-and-six tea at an hotel restaurant—fish and chips and trifle—and Alice was doing her best to bring Joseph out. Not that he needed much encouragement to state his views on life and the steps that he was taking to ensure a steady future. When Dick asked what was the use of saving up for a house deposit when there weren't any houses, Joseph nodded mysteriously and intimated that he had some close friends both in the housing-estate line and in the Ministry of Health. Also, if you knew your way about, you could always wangle any amount of repairs, and maybe even get them listed under war damage.

'What about the poor sods who don't know all these ropes?'

Joseph grinned. 'If everyone knew them, things'd get too obvious.'

'Well, what about 'em?'

'They've got to lump it.'

'I'm one of 'em, so you can't expect me to sympathise.'

'No, it's all in the family. I'll help you to find a place—'

He glanced at Pat with a smirk, and Dick grew coldly furious. 'Thanks, but I decline. I prefer to be one of the poor sods.'

'First time I ever heard you being so virtuous,' said Alice, cutting a chip in half so that she could eat it in a ladylike way. She opened her mouth, in public, only half as wide as at home. That was Joseph's influence, Dick thought—and preferred the clumsy and hoydenish Alice he had left in 1943. Not this pudding-faced paragon pushing a snippet of chip through the prim hole of her mouth.

'Go on,' said Dick to Joseph, 'I'm interested to find out how things were going at home, while the poor sods were overseas.'

'Quite respectable persons do it,' said Joseph, retreating on to the defensive. 'It's merely a matter of being in the know.' He had gingery hair parted in the middle and lifting out in little wings over his ears, and slight furrows already on his brow over the pale eyes that seemed watching the tip of his nose all the while for fear a fly would alight on it.

'You're ridiculous, Dick,' said Alice, bridling. 'Anyone'd think you were a saint yourself. I could tell a thung or two—'

Dick ignored her. He didn't look at Pat either, but stared at Joseph and said slowly. 'Sorry if I'm being slow, but it's the first time I've been asked to dirty my hands.'

'Oh, don't call it that,' said Joseph, looking round in dismay. 'It's only being wideawake and knowing what makes things tick. You've got to be, in this world.'

'Thanks, but I don't happen to like it.'

'Don't you want a house of your own?—'

'I'm not the only one.'

'Yes, that's correct, of course,' said Joseph in a judicial tone of voice. 'But the others aren't us. I mean, when there isn't enough to go round, somebody's got to be lucky. Why shouldn't it be us?'

Dick turned to Pat. 'You're not saying anything. What's your idea? Are you in the crime racket, too?'

'On the side of the law,' she replied, and he couldn't tell what her voice conveyed.

'Joe's on the side of the law, too. I bet he's all for having the full rigour of the law deal with these squatters.'

'You can't have people just walking into private property,' said Joseph, choking over a fishbone.

'Why not?' asked Dick in hard level accents, surprised at his own bitterness. He didn't know what he was defending, but he knew what he hated. These smug skunks like Joseph who were cashing in on the privations and hardships of everyone else. He felt an intolerable wrong had been done to himself and his fellow-soldiers, though all the direct evidence he had was the petty scheming of Joseph, which was possibly more than half invented to make its exponent a big man in Alice's dotting eyes.

'You've got to have law and order,' said Joseph sulkily.

'Of course you have,' snapped Alice. 'Don't be ridiculous, just to show off, Dick.'

He ignored her and turned again to Pat, studying her calm face, her smooth skin, her remote eyes. She took out her handkerchief and wiped the corners of her mouth. 'Do you agree?' he asked in a measured sort of way.

'I suppose so.' She in turn studied him. 'Do you want to do away with it all?'

He was about to reply passionately that he did—though such a mood of violent repudiation was far from his usual attitude, and had been begotten solely by his embittered contrasting of Joseph's complacent face and assured plans with memory images of men suffering, wounded, dying, fevered, toiling in Burma. . . . The images had burst into his mind with a terrible clarity of light which frightened him, which drove him to the repudiation of Joseph's world as the merest tribute he could pay to the tortured and emaciated faces . . . In a moment he'd do something furious, knock the table over, throw the cruet in Joseph's face, shout obscene things at Pat and Alice.

Alice interrupted. 'You're just being rude to everyone, Dick.' She patted Joseph's hand, and with a sudden twist of mood Dick felt a tearing need to laugh, to sprawl back and laugh with a tremendous shout of contempt, to fall laughing on the floor. Alice went on, 'He ought to stop doing nothing and criticising everybody. If he had some work, he wouldn't be so high and mighty. He'd want to find a way out of his troubles like other people.'

Dick fought back the impulse to laugh. 'That's probably true.' He forced himself to look again at Pat. 'Don't you agree?'

This time she stared into her cup of tea. 'I know I'm always upset and a bit lost when my mind isn't made up about something.'

He wanted to answer her: So I'm upset and lost, eh?—as if he blamed her for it. But he said in quieter tones, though still hard and unrelaxed, 'Yes, I don't like waiting. There was a chap on the transport on the voyage out. He jumped overboard near Cape Town.'

'Why?' asked Pat.

'He thought his wife was going with another man. He didn't have any evidence, but she was in a munitions factory. He showed me her photo once. A little fat-faced thing with curly hair. She loved dancing, he said. That's all.'

'I think he was stupid,' said Alice.

'Well, that's how it happened,' said Dick.

About three nights a week he dropped into *The Nelson Arms*, the pub frequented by Mike and his friends, mostly miners. Now that the preliminary tumults of welcome and treating were over, he felt at home there. The pub was nicknamed 'Sally-Up-Steps' after its mistress and the five steps that rose from the cobbled road, and stood at the corner of a long block of soot-faced brick houses without gardens. Fake pillars of stucco enclosed the windows, and the main door was set obliquely across the corner, with VAULT on the frosted glass above. The latch opened on a warm room of scrubbed planks, with yellow imitation graining on the brown paint of the bar and a line of sawdust, spittoons, match ends, crumpled cigarette packets below. That view, with his friends standing at the bar or seated on the benches against the wall, had come to give him a feeling of ease and happiness.

Tonight he had been walking about in town and had had hardly anything for tea, so he went into the chip-shop a few yards away from the pub. A queue of about ten people was waiting, and the smell of frying oil made him realise how hungry he was. On the bench under the window, with its notice FISH TONIGHT and its cinema advertisements, a couple of lads were adding vinegar to their fish. Ahead of Dick in the queue was a short woman with a knitted shawl over her head; and as they edged along the stone-tiled floor, she turned. 'Oh, it's you, Dick Baxter. I met your ma last week in Jubilee Street. She said you was in champion health, eee, and you look it, lad.' He tried to remember her name, nodding to her remarks and watching the fair girl with plaited hair at the potato slicer. With her plump easy movements she looked as if she was wearing nothing but her knee-length smock and straw sandals. Yet there were drops of sweat on her short upper lip. Then the woman gave him the clue he wanted: she said with a roughening of her voice: 'I only wish Bob was back, too. They've got him tied up in Greece, and he's not happy there; no, he's not happy at all.'

'When's he due out, Mrs Utway?' he asked.

But she was poking about in her bag. 'I've got his last letter here. I'd like you to read it. He asks about you, you'll see.' At last she found it. 'You just read that and see what you think.'

He skimmed the first page—enquiries about people at home, re-

marks about the weather. . . . But on the second page the letter suddenly became interesting, and he read on, forgetting the quest for his own name.

It's a poor country mum, you just can't know it until you've seen it with your two eyes, and even then you sometimes don't quite believe it. I can speak a few words of the lingo now, just enough to say good-day and buy a glass of oozoo, you can guess what that is. Well we were getting on okay at first, everyone was so friendly and then all of sudden things happened, I'll tell you—there was a chap Johannides, the head of the local resistance. They'd been in the hills since forty-one, and they fight like devils. It isn't war, we haven't got a word for it, the way these fellows fight and feel about things. But that's not what I started to tell you, we were all on the best of terms, and they were helping us in all sorts of ways, and then one Monday it happened. Even the major didn't like it. He's a Tory if ever there was one, but he didn't like it, nobody liked it. They got Johannides and five more resistance leaders to come to a party, all as friendly as Christmas, and then in the middle of it they arrested them, and they went next day in a lorry to a concentration camp. Thank God I wasn't called on to do any of the dirty work. I suppose I'd have done it, but mum could I ever hold my head up again? I saw the major just after he'd sent them off in the lorry, he was pouring out a tumbler of whisky, and when he saw me standing there, he cursed me like mad. I told him I knocked, and he said come in. Perhaps he was talking to himself, anyway that's what happened, and there's only one that likes it, a lieutenant who was a bank-clerk, he gives us lectures about the Greek Royal Family and the close ties between Greece and Britain and Churchill's bleeding heart and the ungrateful Russians and all that. I hope you'll tell as many as you can. And show this letter to Mike and Alex and Dick and any of the others who are about.

'It wasn't posted from Greece,' said Mrs Utway. 'He gave it to a chap coming home, who posted it in Liverpool.'

'Thanks,' Dick handed it back. 'I hope he's soon demobbed. What's his number?'

She pushed the letter into the bag again and turned to be served. The girl had finished at the potato slicer; she was wiping the sweat off her brow with her bare forearm and gave Dick a smile. The old woman fished some chips out of the fat in a wire net, and went on wrapping them up for Mrs Utway; and the girl took Dick's order, 'Sixpenny fish and three of chips.' Then he added to Mrs Utway, who was going

off. 'Pleased to have met you, Mrs Utway. Remember me to Bob when you write.'

'That I will,' she replied, putting her fish and chips and a steak-pudding in her bag. 'I was hoping he'd be back by Christmas, but hoping doesn't get us very far. It's no use laying sorrow to your heart when others only lay it to their heels.'

The girl handed him his order in its newspaper wrapping, and their hands touched. She smiled boldly at him, and he gave a nod of thanks, moving off round the end of the queue rail. I seem to be getting slow in the uptake, he thought. I meant to smile back, but somehow I do things like that too late nowadays. Still, the encounter had somehow lifted a weight off his spirit, as if he were once again as carefree as he'd been in 1939. Then he remembered Mrs Utway's letter, and stopped in the street, chewing slowly and staring at the fish and chips in the torn wrapping. Fine ash was blowing straight down the street, making his eyes smart, coming from the slagheaps half a mile away.

Rubbing his hands on the paper, he crumpled it up and threw it down in the gutter, and went on into the pub. Mike saw him standing in the doorway. 'Hey, Dick, sit you down,' he called, 'it's as cheap sitting as standing, for all I know.'

'In a mo,' said Dick, and went to get his bitter. Sally was in attendance, standing in front of the four yellowish-white china handles with bright brass tips. Behind her reared the narrow shelves of bottles, glasses, stacks of matches and Woodbine packets, and on the wall at her side hung a square of black glass painted with a gilt clock face: 'Notice. The Clock doesn't tick, the Landlady gives no credit.' She had her hair piled up on top in a spray of small curls, and her warm handsome face was marred by the black hairs thickening on her upper lip.

Mike and the others were talking about football and boxing. 'Eee, but they're really only a junior team. It was stupid putting 'em up; naturally they got walked over.' Somebody demurred that you couldn't tell as easy as all that; now and then there were surprises in that sort of match. Maybe because the team with more weight and reputation was too cocky. Then the conversation got on to Tommy Farr and Woodcock; and Old Ben, with his miner's blue-lined forehead, a fund of information from his daily readings in the Reference Library, remarked that there wasn't any boxing in Germany till after the First World War. Two sailors who'd been prisoners on the Isle of Man went home with the art, and took a boxing booth round. And after each show of theirs, other ex-prisoners got the idea and formed clubs; and the government encouraged the sport, as lots of people said it was British boxing that made our soldiers tough.

As usual, this lump of information had the effect of stupefying the listeners. 'What's it prove?' asked Alex at last.

'How we led the world in sport,' said Old Ben, becoming more chauvinistic than correct. 'There was no sport anywhere till Britain showed the world.'

Ted, who fancied himself, asked if it was your real self that came out when you were drunk, or did drink make you somebody else. Alex replied it was a fact people did funny things with too much liquor aboard—but what did that prove? He raised his glass, 'Beer is best and bugger the Band of Hope!' Mike said, no, there was something in what Ted said, look at the way that the folk on holiday at Blackpool forgot most of their manners and all their morals. But that didn't prove they hadn't any morals at home.

'There's no harm in it,' said Old Ben, 'or not much. You may think things are wild enough nowadays, but it's nowt to Blackpool in August in my young days. I knew the Pleasure Beach when it was a few tents with sand all over 'em and only paraffin flares at night. No-body gave a tuppenny damn, and beer was flowing like water. And when I say beer, I mean beer, and not this piss and chemicals that isn't strong enough to drown a mouse. Why, drinking it is like talking to yourself. In those days you could get sozzled by walking along the promenade and being breathed on.'

'It may have been better in the days of Methuselah,' said Mike, 'but it's still not too bad.'

'You got to kick over the traces now and then,' said Old Ben. 'It does you good. If you don't, you go hard inside.'

'It all depends on the day of the week,' said a nuggety man named Biggs, 'and the visitors. The Scots make the most noise, and the Manchester folk lose their heads the easiest. Most of ours just have a beer or two and sit staring at the sea. It's the grandest way of going to sleep. What I used to like best myself was to go out fishing on a steamboat. Once I won the sweepstake for catching the widest fish.'

Sam guffawed. 'Do you remember the trouble we had last year to get Mike home. Three times we heaved him off to Central Station, and each time he got away again. All those yelling kids, and the fellows with beer bottles in one pocket and bags of rock in the other.'

They were all silent a moment, as if in memories of Blackpool they looked back on an heroic age of enjoyment which had departed for ever, leaving a commonplace world. Dick thought of the fair girl in the chip-shop and wondered again how old she was. The talk about Blackpool had stirred something in him. Now, looking back, the moments when he almost let himself go with Pat in the park and when

he almost threw the cruet at Joseph's head, seemed the only moments he had come alive.

Someone was singing in the back parlour, a cheerfully amorous music-hall song. Into the bar came a little woman with pleasant wrinkled face, in Salvation Army bonnet, who went round trying to sell copies of *The War Cry*. Nobody bought any—nobody ever did—but she went out with her usual bright smile, 'Thank you all kindly.'

Mike remarked that Nick Grey had joined the Salvation Army. 'He was always a serious lad, and he likes the cornet.'

'He could have joined the colliery brass band,' said Alex.

'Well, he joined the Army.'

'Four playing, and twenty going round with the hat,' said Old Ben.

Alex collected the glasses and went over to the bar. 'A gill all round, Sally.' He counted his money. 'Ah, my brass has got as many legs as an earwig.'

The others were talking about a mean chap who was always trying to get treated without waiting for his turn—he found something urgent to take him off as soon as his turn came round; or he fiddled about in his pocket and waited till someone else brought the coins out. They all expressed contempt for him; and Old Ben, retired miner and pub-oracle, declared that a man couldn't get drunk when drinking only what others paid for. Alex brought over the new round, and gave them the health. 'Good health, hope t'queen never gets measles!'

Then the sound of the back-parlour singing started the talk off on Ruby Trap, a legendary character who'd been a music-hall star of the town, no one knew quite when, though Old Ben swore he'd seen her in her great act. 'Ah, she was a fine figure of a woman. When she came on, you thought all the lights went up ten times brighter. And she cared for nobody, no, not she. Not for the Queen reigning over China on her golden throne.' He sang wheezyly, 'Ta-ra-boom-de-ay!'

'The town must have been different then,' said Mike. 'Why, if you even want a game of dominoes now, you've got to go to Manchester.'

Stories about Ruby were exchanged, familiar stories that were always welcome, told in definite comic formulas. Stories that credited her with a tremendous, shameless gusto and a capacity to sing on the spot a song against any sham or dirty work she encountered. 'Gospel truth,' Old Ben witnessed. 'Someone ought to write a book about her. She was killed in the knife-throwing act, right in the heart. Some say it was an accident, some say it was jealousy which did it, but nowt was proved, and now it's a secret gone to the grave. Ah, those were the days.'

'When men were men and women wore stays,' said Mike.

'Don't women wear stays still?' asked Biggs. 'Mine does.' But nobody enlightened him.

Dick leaned over to Mike. 'Did Mrs Utway show you that letter from her Bob?'

Mike nodded. 'Rotten business. I tried to bring it up at the Lodge, but I got side-tracked.'

Dick took a pull at his beer. 'Couldn't you get any backing?'

'Aw, I'm no good at these things. I can't keep to rules and regulations. Not like you. You used to thrive on 'em.'

Ted was explaining why he'd given up working on the land and gone back to the mine. 'How could I go cycling with the lads on week-ends? I didn't mind the work so much, but I never knew where I was.'

Dick stared at the notice on the wall: 'The Last Great Scorer doesn't Count, if you Won or Lost, but it's How you Played the Game.' There was something pressing in at the back of his mind. Blackpool, Ruby Trap, week-end cycle tours, Old Ben's benevolent dark-lined face, Mike's grin, the woman singing in the back parlour. . . . He leaned over again. 'I'm coming back to the pit.'

Mike nodded. 'I knew you would.'

'So did I.'

They both laughed. Will Frazer came in with his wife Milly, who smiled at the landlady and went through into the parlour. After a while the waiter came in, and Sally called from the bar, 'That's up on you, Will, price of a Guinness, please.' Will went over to the bar and asked her who else was in the parlour; and the landlady told him to look in and see. 'Not on a week-day,' he answered. 'It's different on Saturday.'

The waiter whispered to Sally, and she remarked to Will. 'Your Milly's in a good mood tonight. She's treating the others. That's two more Guinnesses, please.'

'The bitch,' said Will, paying up. 'She swore she was only going to have a mild. She'll be the ruin of me.'

'They're making up the accounts for the raffle. Don't be too hard on her.'

'What is it this time?'

'You go and ask 'em. I don't want to give no state secrets away. All in due time.'

'When the sea gives up its dead,' said Old Ben. 'There was only one woman who ever told the truth, and she was born dumb.'

'It's a lovely life,' said Alex, expanding his chest. 'I enjoy every moment of it. And why not?'

London

PHYL HAD ARRANGED to meet Bette at the Savoy. She wanted to see the strikers in action and learn how things had gone at Bette's own hotel; it was important for her to see if Bette lived up to her promises of action. She arrived first, at about half-past six. The placarded pickets were moving up and down, watched by the police. One of them, a girl with light hair and thin face, held out a collecting-box to Phyl, who put sixpence in. The girl smiled pleasantly, and Phyl was about to speak. But the girl saw someone else coming and turned with the box. A tall long-faced woman, smartly dressed with a spotted half-veil over the top part of her face, said something that sounded rude, and brushed the box aside. The girl came back and said cheerily. 'They don't like it, do they?' Phyl was pleased at the way the girl spoke of *them*, excluding the smartly dressed woman, and she replied enthusiastically, no, they didn't like it. The girl went on, 'Brrr, it's getting cold, isn't it? The taximen are fine. They won't take any fares for the hotels on strike.'

'Do you think you'll win?'

'Of course. I don't work here. I'm from the C.S.C.A., but I feel now as if it were my strike as much as theirs.'

Phyl wanted to tell her about Ted King and the squatters, and about Bette, to show that she, too, had her links with the strike. But she didn't know how to begin, and a policeman, seeing that they had halted, told them loudly to move on. As they walked across the Savoy entry, Phyl managed to mention that she was waiting for Bette, and wanted to know what had happened at her hotel. 'Why, they're out today,' said the girl. 'I'm sure Harry was saying so.' She beckoned to a man who was walking up and down with boards lettered **SUPPORT THE SAVOY STRIKERS**, and he came over.

'Yes. After lunch today. I don't know the details.' He smiled at Phyl, who thought he looked young and strong and handsome, even if he was a bit heavily built.

'I'm sure my friend had a lot to do with it,' she said eagerly; and glanced round to see Bette coming up. 'Here she is. Did you get them out, Bette?' she asked as soon as Bette was near.

'I did my bit,' replied Bette, flushing. 'It was one of the cooks who really started things. We were all getting on edge and talking in corners. The manageress went into the kitchen with a face like a rattlesnake and said something, so he picked up a handful of dough and threw it at her. We all cheered, and the strike was on.'

Two policemen came up and told them to disperse at once. Phyl and Bette linked arms and moved on; and in a few moments Harry came running after them. He had handed his boards over to someone ready to take a turn. Slipping his arm into Bette's, he led the way down a side street towards the Embankment. 'Cuppa,' he remarked, and began asking Bette questions.

'I'm on the committee,' said Bette, flushing again; and Phyl was very glad. If Bette was on the committee, it proved that she hadn't just been showing off at Matt's party and that her fellow-workers trusted her. Bette went on, 'I must be back by nine. There'll be a report. They're trying to get Arthur Lewis to come along, too.'

'He had an injunction out against him today,' said Harry. 'So have Ravera and Piazza. They're trying to break the Union down.'

They went into a small café, and Harry ordered tea. A large, jovial man joined them. 'Had the surprise of my life this afternoon. We were parading by the Regent Palace. A sergeant comes up and says we can't do it. "Picketing's lawful," says I. "Okay," he says, "but not here." "Where then?" says I. He thinks a bit. "You can go to Leicester Square," he says after a while. "But we're waiting for the shift to come off," says I. "Never you mind about shifts," he says, "we'll look after them, you're obstructing the public here." So he moved us on, and I thought that was the end. But what do you think? When the shift comes off, he surrounds 'em with his men and marches 'em down to us, without so much as asking their leave. That was real co-operation, I ask you.'

'Listen, George,' said Harry. 'We don't need telling how good it is to see the down-trodden catering trades standing up for themselves'—he tempered his rhetoric, at once serious and satirical of jargon, with a wink at the down-trodden girls—'but what's the ultimate political significance of the development—if there is one?'

George, a member of the Westminster Trades Council, touched Harry's hand. 'Brother, when you've been in the movement as long as I have, you'll know there's always an ultimate political significance, as you call it. It's all just an awakening of the human spirit, brother. That's what life is on earth, and nothing else, an awakening to the light or a falling back on deeper slumber and bad dreams. Well, we fight for the awakening, and this strike means hundreds of our brothers and sisters getting a spark in their souls.' He finished off his tea and at once called for another cup. 'That's ultimate enough for me.'

'Of course I agree with all that,' said Harry, a little impatiently, wanting to show the girls how clearly and concretely, how fundamentally, he thought. 'But I'm speaking of tactics—I mean immediate effects and the problems based on them. Let me explain. In 1945 the

people voted for a decisive change in the system. Some of them called it socialism, some of them didn't call it anything, but they all wanted a real break with the old ways of running our country. That's so, isn't it?

'It is, brother.'

'Well, they've made certain gains, but the challenge to the old ways hasn't been carried out,' Harry went on, mixing his delight in rhetoric with a kind of inverted-comma picking-out of the cant phrases. 'The rot of compromise and class collaboration goes too deep in the Labour leaders. There are two possible results. Either the people forget their hopes and weaken until the Tories can stage a comeback, or they gather new forces of resistance—clearer about what they want and how to get it. Now, is this strike a turning-point in the positive direction?

'I'm sure it is,' Bette interrupted.

Harry smiled gratefully at her. 'I hope so, too. After all, the catering trades have always been the most backward, the most exploited—'

'One of the least organised,' George corrected amiably.

'Exactly. Then does this sudden militancy mean that the struggle is reaching bedrock—that the fighting forces in the Labour movement, in the British people in general, are now gathering for a decisive showdown with the right-wing leadership, to chuck them out or mould them to the people's will? Or is it just a flash-in-the-pan?' He sat back, feeling he had explained himself badly, and yet clenching his fists stubbornly, thrusting out his lower lip and staring at George as if George's opinion was going to settle the matter. Giving a side glance at Bette, he saw her watching him with a warm look of admiration in her soft long-lashed eyes; she was holding a teaspoon in her two hands, pressing her thumbs against it as if measuring her strength against the base metal. She had taken off her coat and he noticed her plain but charming blue dress, with short sleeves and square-cut neck, probably made by herself, but capably done. Now she attracted him far more than the other girl, the one with the little oval face and glistening dark ringlets, whom he had wanted to impress at the outset.

'I'm afraid you're being too absolute, brother,' said George in his mild voice that gave Phyl the feeling of great wisdom. 'All you say about the people is true. It's a fact they want things to move. But that doesn't mean their hopes and desires won't be betrayed yet further. I am sorry, but my experience compels me to think that the more they push the more every effort will be made to side-track them.'

'Yes, but——' said Bette impulsively, and then halted. 'No, go on.'

'Hasn't the retreat on steel already begun?' said George, lighting a cigarette. 'Hasn't the government put pressure this month on Iceland

to compel its acceptance of a U.S.A. war-base? Hasn't Smuts recently called for a Western bloc—and what Smuts says today, the Foreign Office was saying yesterday in its memoranda, and Bevin will be saying tomorrow as government policy. Aren't the U.S.A. demanding a navy base at Naples this very moment, and isn't our Cabinet backing them? He shook his head. 'It isn't so simple, brother. It isn't just what's happening in Britain that counts.'

'I know all that,' said Harry. 'What I'm asking is this. Will the forces of the people rise in Britain in time to prevent the sell-out? Isn't this strike a proof?'—he hesitated and changed the word—'evidence that they won't lie down as the retreat from socialism goes on?'

'They won't lie down, that's a fact,' said George. 'But it's going to take longer than you think, brother.'

Others from the picket-line came in, and stories about the strike were exchanged. The Savoy boilermen and engineers had joined in, and the Americans in the hotel would be freezing. One Yankee business-man had been overheard asking the police why they didn't use tear-gas, and a platinum blonde, going rather drunk into the hot ^{of} late last night, had asked the chilled pickets, 'Well, chaps, when do ^{bes} the raping start? I hate missing anything.'

George went out to help Piazza (who was in charge of the picket ^{line}), the police were raising some difficulty. Harry told the girls that George was a Quaker, and Bette said that she'd always thought Quakers ^{George} against anything like wars and strikes. 'George's a pacifist,' he ^{wasn't} her, 'and I've no doubt most Quakers don't like strikes. But he's ^{is} out for the class struggle. He says it's the only way to end wars and ^a a Christian community.'

'I never thought of it like that,' said Bette, as if she had thought ^{it} it all sorts of other ways.

They went out. 'You'll be in the march of course,' said Harry. 'See you in Hyde Park.' He turned to Phyl. 'Are you coming, too?'

She shook her head. 'I'd like to, but it seems a cheat, when I've nothing to do with the strike. Hyde Park you said, didn't you? I'll be there to cheer you.'

'It's a promise,' he said.

On Sunday morning her father wasn't feeling well. He'd read in the newspaper that the Cornish tin-miners were demanding two shillings more and the management were asking for Poles as cheap labour; and he had one of his rare moments of homesickness for the Cornwall left twenty-five years before. He rambled on about the sad and bad times he'd known in Redruth, the soup-kitchens and the riots in the streets. 'We never had no trade unions, but we had our independence, and

we stuck to it. What's wrong nowadays is that nobody hasn't no independence. It's all asking someone else to do things for you, nobody standing on his own feet.' And he dredged up vague memories, buttermilk cakes as big as cart-wheels that it took two women to carry, and his father's tales about the Dicklydise at Burrows Down Farm, when Tommy Dumlens, having drunk too much cider, begged his friends, 'Carry me home and don't bend me, for I'm feeling a bit possed up.' Then shaking his head, returning to his complaints over the lack of spirit of independence outside Cornwall, and moralising with a sigh, 'Well, a bellyful is a bellyful, whether it's meat, joy, or sorrow.'

Then there was a squabble on the landing. Mrs Banting spilt some hot water and accused Mrs Tremaine of butting into her, and three half-cooked sausages were knocked over the rails. Mrs Tremaine retorted that they weren't much loss, as Mrs Banting couldn't cook hot water for a barber. Upstairs the Contarinis had their radio on full blast, and were holding one of their week-end quarrels at the same time, outscraming the radio soprano. Mrs Banting told Mrs Tremaine that she didn't know her ears from her elbows; and then in a lull Mr Banting observed caustically to the world in general, 'You can always stoop and pick up nothing,' adding as a sort of aside, 'nowadays people's manneristics are all degonnerated.'

Phyl felt nauseated. Generally she accepted the family life in all its crowded inadequacy, withdrawn into a world of her own and ignoring the unpleasant aspects. But every now and then the evasion, the refuge of her dream-world, wouldn't work; and this morning was one of the difficult moments. She washed behind the paper screen which Mrs Tremaine had picked up in the street market. She knew by heart all the stamps, cigarette-cards, and postcards gummed over it, but she would read them mechanically as she stood there—cricketers like Trumble and a snail, *helix pomatia*, introduced by the Romans into Britain, and the seaside postcard, 'The view from here is too lovely for words' (the view was a blank looking seawards, but having the whole scene blocked out by the vast posterior of a woman in pink bathing clothes). Then she rolled up her mattress, with the bed ready-made inside it, and put an old bit of a blue tablecloth over it. She always tidied up her own bedding, to stop the others from prying and perhaps spoiling the small box of cosmetics hidden there. Next she tried to study herself in the mirror enclosed in a tarnished wreath of gilt plaster. Her ringlets and her oval face pleased her, and today her eyes seemed to slant more than usual under their thin brows. But her nose looked too long, she thought, and she attempted to see herself in profile with the aid of her pocket mirror. Mostly she didn't bother about her profile, she knew that full-face was her strong point. But today she somehow wanted to

know the worst, to admit that everything, the lodgings and her profile alike, weren't what they should be. Her eyes were a sort of greenish grey or greyish blue, they seemed to change with the light. Her mouth was rather long, neither thin nor full; and when she made it up with lipstick, she tried to get something of the baby-roundness that came easily to Kath's pouting face. Her skin had a certain pallor, a glistening smoothness, which she felt was injured rather than aided by powder; but she lacked the courage to drop cosmetics altogether when going out with Kath, or with Pearl, her second-best friend, who worked in a tobacconist's shop.

'What are you doing so long behind there?' asked Mrs Tremaine in that crude, rude voice that could hurt Phyl so deeply, a voice that she only used when her temper was badly frayed. What was it that hurt Phyl so much in the question? The hostile note of suspicion, the coarse tone that somehow made the degradation of the morning shudderingly real. As if to say: Trying to make yourself out better than the rest of us? Well, you're my daughter, and you see the sort of ugly mund I've got.

'Nothing,' mumbled Phyl, wanting to delay the moment of emergence and knowing that every moment of delay made things worse.

Mrs Tremaine caught hold of the screen and swung it aside. 'Go and throw your dirty water out. Do you want to hoard it? Anyone'd think you sweated gold.'

'Leave me alone, said Phyl weakly.

'Stop fooling about with yourself, and go and find Herb. He slipped out while I was telling Mrs Banting off.'

Phyl went to get her coat and scarf from behind the door, and passed through the Banting room without a look to left or right, though she couldn't help noticing that Mr Banting was washing his feet in front of the gas-fire and young Banting was lying on the cast-iron bedstead with his hands behind his head, in vest and slacks. On the stairs she had to flatten herself to let fat Mrs Crosley get past with her baby, then she clattered down the worn and chipped stone steps into the asphalt yard, and went out by the side passage. There were several places where Herb might be lurking, and she knew them all; she'd find him with persistence, as long as he hadn't any new tricks up his sleeve.

First, the big bomb-damage site. There was a cellar there that the boys had excavated; they used a devious approach and kept the place secret. The going wasn't easy, she slipped on a piece of ragged concrete and tore her dress on a rusty bit of steel rod. Nobody appeared when she called in subdued tones, peering into the dark, dank hole of the

cellar. 'Herb, are you there? I've got something for you. . . .' No answer. Then she thought she heard a low murmuring, and found the lighter in her bag. She ventured half into the entry, struck the lighter, and for one lurid moment saw Dot Magston in the arms of a lad she didn't know—she only saw his back. Dot, aged about fourteen, but looking twice as developed as Phyl who was five years her elder—her face flushed and defiant, her mouth open in an idiotic way and her hair all over the place.

Phyl hastily quenched the light and withdrew, feeling sick and weak. First her mother spoke in that horrid voice, then she tore her dress, the best one she had, and then Dot. . . . But she drove herself on in the search. Now to the blind alley where there were sure to be hopscotch games and half a dozen lads and girls circling round on bicycles without holding the handle-bars. But Herb wasn't there, and Bobs, a small girl who was very solemnly playing hopscotch on her own, hadn't seen him.

She tried the back of the barber's shop, with its large shed. This shed had been locked in 1939 and left to rats and spiders, but the boys sometimes got in through a broken window where the boarding could be lifted aside. She put her head in and couldn't hear a sound. She felt sure no one was inside, there was undisturbed dust on the sill, but she called out, 'Herb, are you there? I've got something for you. . . .' Then she went to the Rawlings' house, but Mrs Rawlings said her own Jim had been out since nine o'clock, and she hadn't any time to bother about his comings and goings, Mr Rawlings had a swelling on his groin and the rats had got into the landing-cupboard and spoiled a pound of sausages. 'And I've got the wind myself something dreadful,' said Mrs Rawlings. 'It's the worry that does it, not the things I eat.'

Phyl was giving up when she saw Herb by chance in the muddy lane by *The Bat and Ball*, a small, gloomy pub where much betting went on. He was arguing loudly with three other boys, and didn't see her till she was close. Catching him by the collar, she demanded, 'Why didn't you come home? You'll drive mum mad one of these days.'

'I never asked her to be such a damn fool.' He pulled and wriggled.

'You mustn't talk of her like that—'

'Aw, don't be a spoil sport,' said an older lad whom she hadn't noticed. He was lounging against the pub's back door with a half-cigarette dangling from his lower lip. She didn't know his name, but she knew him by sight as one of the pin-table boys.

'It's none of your business,' she replied hotly. 'You keep out of this.'

'Who is it, Herb?' he asked languidly. 'Your ma or your aunt?'

The boys dutifully laughed. 'She's just my nuisance,' said Herb, encouraged and pulling harder. 'Lemme go.'

'I'll tell mum and she'll beat you,' said Phyl in desperation.

'Aw sister, lay off,' said the lout. 'You wouldn't be a bad-looker if you took that frown off your face and had your hair done up. Tell you what,' he added magnanimously, 'I'll show you a place where they could make you look a proper dame—for next to nothing, too. They know me, see?'

'Go on, Phyl,' said Herb, feeling there must be something in her if the great Max Judkins thought her worth his attention. 'Don't be stupid.'

She dragged him off down the lane amid the jeers of the others, and held tight to his collar all the way home, ignoring his complaints that she was strangling him and his astonished scorn that she hadn't fallen for Max. From the landing she realised another quarrel had blown up between her mother and Mrs Banting, who was caustically remarking, 'You, you've got a hinge on your tongue and you talk with both ends.' Pushing Herb in, she held the door handle to make sure he didn't duck out again, and then ran off down the stairs. As she wanted to keep some money in hand for the afternoon, she couldn't buy any lunch, and she was determined not to be caught up in the turmoils of home again. So she decided to call on Pearl.

Mrs Rigsby, a bosomy, kind-hearted woman, clapped her hands. 'Well, and if it isn't Phyl Tremaine! I was asking Pearlie only yesterday when you were coming along to see us. I want to hear all about that squatting you did. Funny word, isn't it? Sounds as if you spent all the time in the W.C. Come on, take off your things at once and make yourself at home. Cheer Pearlie up if you can, for I can't. She's been moping for days.'

Pearl was curled up in a large leather arm-chair, a plump little thing with a small nose and a very big mouth. She didn't stir at Phyl's entry, merely let her book slip on to the floor, yawned and stretched her arms up. 'Hullo, Phyl.' She yawned again.

They lived in a basement flat, two rooms and a shed. Mr Rigsby was a night-watchman, and his wife eked out his wages by breeding budgerigars. 'You ought to try it,' she said to Phyl, as she did every visit. 'It's as easy as going to bed. They keep on breeding like one-o'-clock. What a life! They enjoy themselves, and you get the profit. And if you're lucky enough to produce a blue one, you get about twenty pounds. I've only had one blue yet. Come and say hullo to the pets.'

She had three home-made cages in the front room, one in the bedroom (where Rigsby was at the moment snoring gently), and a larger one in the shed. Phyl had a look at them all, though she'd often seen them before. She liked Mrs Rigsby and she liked budgerigars, so it was a pleasant tour of inspection. Pearl yawned and tried to pick up a book

from the floor; but it was too much of a bother, so she closed her eyes and snuggled up again in the chair. 'I wish you could find out what's wrong with her,' said Mrs Rigsby, lowering her voice though they were outside in the shed—as if she didn't want the budgerigars troubled with her family affairs. She stirred the seed with her finger through the bars. 'You know that father of hers isn't what you'd call a man of spirit. If any burglars ever broke into the place where he night-watches, he'd show 'em where everything is. But what's worrying me is that girl of mine. Something's come over her. She just curls up and sucks peppermunts.'

'I'm going to Hyde Park after dinner,' said Phyl, watching the budgerigars and wondering why people acted so foolishly. She had the feeling that she and Mrs Rigsby were the only sensible people left in the world. 'Perhaps she'll come.'

'You go in and talk to her,' replied Mrs Rigsby, with a kindly squeeze. 'You can't be yourselves with mothers coming all over you with big flapping ears. Have a heart-to-heart talk with her. I'm going to pop in next door, and then I'll get father up.'

Phyl stayed a moment more, admiring the budgerigars brightly preening and flitting about, the clear dark lines that looked as if someone had just painted them that moment and stood back to admire the fine work, the curved-in beaks and the feathers in the lower part of the face like heavy jowls—the whole effect rather like an impossibly dainty parody of an old gentleman in a very old photograph. They seemed so satisfied with themselves, too, these small birds, unaware of the critical and admiring eyes upon them. She glanced round in a moment of discomfort, feeling as she'd felt when she visited her friend Pauline who died near the end of the war and whose pious mother had a large text over the bed, 'Thou God Seest Me' with an eye like a setting sun. Then she went back to the front room.

But Pearl didn't want to talk. She kept on pushing back her loose floppy hair and yawning. All she said was, 'I just hate everybody. No, not you, Phyl, but everybody else.'

'What about Roy?'

She shivered. 'Don't mention him, please.'

Phyl was surprised at the contortion of her face. 'All right, you only have to say it. She leaned closer and changed the subject. 'Do you know what? The other day Kath told me she was meeting Dave, so she couldn't come to Nell's birthday party. But I met Dave in the street that very night, and he didn't know anything about it. I'm sure she was meeting the manager of the hotel where she works—'

'She's a fool,' said Pearl bitterly. 'I always said she was an awful fool.'

^ A crescendo of groans, bumps and finally shouts from the next room announced that Rigsby was being got out of bed.

Phyl had her meal at the Rugsbys', but she had to go on to Hyde Park alone. As she had lots of time, she decided to go to the Embankment first. I ought to have come with Kath, she thought; and felt a slight compunction at having become so wrapped up in Bette that she'd neglected Kath; but she told herself that Kath's lies had justified her. Oh, I do hope it doesn't rain. She caught a trolley-bus, and then went on the Metropolitan to the Temple.

Out on the spacious Embankment behind the Savoy the strikers were already gathered in their contingents, with a fringe of onlookers. Phyl moved up and down, searching for Bette, and at last found her hidden behind a large placard. 'Where's Kath?' she asked.

'I didn't tell you yesterday,' said Bette. 'It went clean out of my head when we were talking of so many other things. She hasn't been acting at all well. You know we were chipping her about Mr Grivens. She must have got in deeper with him than we thought. She didn't want to come out on strike, and one of the girls saw her in his room. It looked like she was warning him what was going on.'

'Oh, I'm sure Kath wouldn't do that,' said Phyl, and the next moment she wasn't sure at all. She suddenly felt that she didn't really know anything about people; she was always being taken in by what they told her. But she went on defending Kath, a friend she had known much longer than Bette. 'I know she does get swept off her feet, but there isn't any harm in her. She's a bit soft in the way she falls for men much older than herself. Last year she lost her head about a purser on a ship. I didn't like him myself; he was noisy, with a mad look in his eye, and he kept on pawing you. Well, he strung her on with a tale about taking her as a stowaway to New York. He had the scheme all worked out, and she thought he was wonderful. He was going to find her a job in a night-club. But he didn't turn up at the meeting to take her away, and there she was with her best clothes all crushed into a suitcase, waiting from eight o'clock till one o'clock next morning—and then she found the ship had gone at nine a.m. the day before. Wasn't she furious, and didn't she swear she'd never again believe anything in trousers? But she's made that way. Besides, she can't stick that stepfather of hers, and I don't blame her.'

She paused with an uneasy sense that instead of defending Kath she was providing ammunition against her. But really, she thought, I do want to make Bette understand. Poor Kath, just can't control herself in some things; her mother's the slave of the man she married to get a father for Kath; and ever since he found out she wasn't a widow but

had Kath without a wedding-ring, he's treated her like dirt. But while she was still thinking how best to explain things, she had a staff with a cardboard placard pushed into her hand, and took it without realising what she'd done. What was Bette saying?

'That's all very well. Her idea of fun isn't mine, but I wouldn't hold it against her if she didn't mix it up with things like this strike. If she's a stinking little snob——'

'No, it's not that,' protested Phyl. But before they could say any more, the line began moving. Someone gave Phyl a shove in the back and she stumbled forward; then she looked round for the man who'd put the placarded staff in her hand. The marchers in front were shouting slogans. Banners and placards were swaying in agitated movement, and a mounted policeman cantered by. 'What'll I do with this?' Phyl asked.

'You took it,' said Bette gaily. 'You'd better stick to it. Nobody's going to shoot you. Rebecca couldn't come along, her mother's sick. You just deputise for her.'

I don't even know Rebecca, Phyl wanted to say, but she found herself stepping forward. And she liked it, she wanted to be in the march, though she still had a vague sense of trespass, of false pretences. Then she thought, it's not that Rebecca, it's Kath I'm substituting for, and she felt better; she felt as if she were lessening Kath's guilt. Now the rôles were finally reversed; she who had always looked up to Kath had been talking about poor Kath and defending her bad behaviour as the result of an unhappy home life. Poor Kath.

Their contingent came about half-way in the procession, which consisted of at least two thousand people. As they turned up towards the Strand, she felt a mounting excitement. She'd never been in anything like this march before. Even at the Sunday-school outing where she ran in the hundred yards, she hadn't felt such a thrill—though she'd known she was going to win, and she did win, easily. After that she'd dreamed of being an athlete, and loved seeing snippets of athletic events on the news-reels. But where could she practise? And so she'd forgotten that ambition. Now once again she had the giddy feeling of a myriad eyes concentrated on the nape of her neck and sending shivers down her spine. Sometimes she'd had this sort of feeling at the cinema, in a Great Love Scene, and that had made her want to follow in Kath's footsteps. But this time, as well as the strange and unnerving thrill, there was the pride she had felt in the foot-race. Digging her toes again into the turf, feeling light and acry in sandshoes, in a thin summer frock with hardly anything underneath.

They came out into the Strand. There was a jam of people at the corner. She gave one glance at the curious and indifferent faces, and

straightened her back, holding the placard up firm and high. And she swore to herself that since she thus appeared before the world on the pavement as a representative of the strikers, she'd be true to the cause . . . the words on the placards, on her own placard: *Trade Unionism, Freedom, Better Conditions, Solidarity*. She wasn't sure what the cause was in its full working-out, what the big words implied when the march was ended and the strike was won; but she felt the meaning of it all inside her, in the deep determination and happiness that gripped her, the pride of being there in the defiant march. And now this coming out into the open, into the street of the bannered march, seemed the natural conclusion of the night when they slipped secretly into the hotel with the other squatters. Now she felt sure that the squatting adventure had not been useless, had not gone astray into defeat and foolishness, as her father held. Now she saw it as no defeat, she saw it as a moment of the endless struggle which had converged on this Sunday in the resolute march of the hotel and restaurant strikers. Hadn't that been what Ted King meant? She couldn't remember his words, but she saw his face again in the dim lights of the hotel hall and was sure she had understood at last. Everything suddenly made sense. Oh, don't let me ever forget again.

They went on down the Strand, and she tried to stare proudly ahead, but every now and then she gave a half-glance at the people on the pavement. A mounted policeman on a perfectly groomed chestnut horse went past, and the very sleekness, the thorough training of the horse, the riding mastery of the man, all merged to give an effect of menace, of the carefully prepared forces of repression against which the march was aimed. And it seemed incredible to her that the people remained tamely and undemonstratively on the pavement, with the gap between them and the marchers which was maintained by the sleek and lovely horse and its capable rider. And though now and then there were cries of encouragement or cheers from the pavement, these expressions of goodwill seemed to stress even more strongly the division which it was the police's work to preserve. Otherwise all would march, all the people, and then what would happen?

The marchers every short while shouted slogans about the strike, but she didn't join in. Her mood of exaltation, while uniting her with the others, with the whole marching movement, somehow closed-in her senses; it heightened her sensibility and armoured her apart. She felt that if she shouted, she would lose all control of her voice; it would flag away into a whisper or soar in a piercing scream. She knew that what was happening was something of the utmost importance for her; it was bringing to a head ideas and emotions that had been obscurely stirring inside her for months. And so she felt a need of

restraint, of patient waiting on these deep and hidden changes for which she had no words as yet and which seemed to need this intense and devoted concentration of her will-power.

They went on down past Charing Cross into Trafalgar Square. A short check, and then they moved on to the Mall, up into Piccadilly, and on towards the Park. All the while she sustained her conviction or exalted discovery, her happiness to which the beat of the marching feet gave a ground-power, a steady basis. It was a relief, and yet a disappointment, when at last they passed through the lines of cheering supporters and reached the open space inside the Park where they halted and after a while broke up. The main organisers and speakers were already on the platform.

'How are you feeling?' asked Bette. 'You look a bit white about the gills.'

'No, no, it was fine . . . I'm ever so glad I was in it.'

They moved aside under some trees, arm-in-arm, and watched the crowd, which was rapidly growing. Now they were part of it, no longer the vanguard force marching to the trysting-place; now they were simply part of the gathering crowd, and could relax without the pressure of responsibility tightening round their brows. 'It does make you think. . . .' Bette was trying to find words for the emotions that they shared. Phyl said nothing, but pressed Bette's arm. She felt an overflowing love for Bette, a much stronger emotion than she could recall ever having felt for anyone else. She wanted to ask Bette to exchange some sort of oath of eternal friendship, to swear that they would work and struggle on together. But she felt it was somehow silly and out of proportion. Either a friendship lasted, or it didn't. You couldn't tie it down. But then people took an oath, a pledge, when they were married, and that was supposed to hold them together. . . . Oh, if life was always like this! The march, the shared emotion—that was the oath, the bond.

She felt a little faint and leaned against a tree, wondering if Bette felt the same—if anyone had ever felt the same about things. She'd never asked herself that question before, she'd always wanted to feel like other people, behave like them. She'd been jealous of Kath, not because she had lots of boys, but because she seemed to have some sort of feeling about the boys which Phyl didn't have. But now she had lost that wish to be like others and feel all that they felt, afraid of missing something. Now she was standing on her own feet, and what she wanted was to make other people feel as she felt, do as she did. She confusedly realised this reversal of her attitudes, but could not make out what it portended. Only, she felt a need of Bette, of the new sort of relationship which she had discovered with her.

'Hallo,' said a familiar voice. She looked round to see Harry coming up from behind. 'Thought I saw you both in the march. Pretty good, wasn't it?'

'It'll shake 'em,' said Bette. 'Where have you been?'

'The fascists had a big meeting last night at Denison House in Vauxhall Bridge Road. I was there with a few others. Outside the doors, I mean. But a girl got in—don't know her name—and she stood up in the middle of an anti-Soviet rant by Raven-Thompson and gave 'em a few hometruths.'

'Didn't they throw her out?'

'Of course. She was a bit bruised and torn about by the time they flung her on to the pavement. We had a brush with the thugs, but of course the police didn't intervene except to whack one of our chaps.' He laughed. 'Interesting things about the police. You can always tell the political temperature from the way they behave. In the later years of the war and just after, butter wouldn't melt in their democratic mouths. When we made that demo against the fascist meeting in the Albert Hall, they positively co-operated. Some of our old-timers were quite upset. Seemed somehow wrong to have the police on our side. Well, they needn't worry any longer. The last few months the police have steadily swung back towards their old line—defend the fascists and bash the communists.'

'Do you think they get orders?' asked Bette.

'Yes, but exactly who from, I don't know. It'd be an eye-opener, I'm sure, to find out how the gentlemanly indications of policy made by the Home Secretary and other Ministers are interpreted and handed on by the departmental heads, the big police-boys and the rest, and how they filter on down the hierarchy. To some extent it's, no doubt, an instinct. A sort of second sense that bureaucrats get in the application of policy signs from above. But there's someone calling me. I say, can we have tea together? Meet you at this tree in an hour's time? Good.' He hurried off.

'Do you think he's a communist?' Phyl asked, watching him go.

'I wouldn't be surprised. All I know is that he's studying law at the L.S.E.'

'Dad's awfully hot against 'em,' said Phyl, embarrassed. 'But it seems to me . . . well, I liked Ted King—he was the one who organised things when we squatted. . . . Oh, yes and I heard Phil Piratin once at a street meeting in Stepney. I liked him, too. He had such a funny friendly sort of face, but I can't remember what he said. . . . Why is everyone so down on them? I mean the papers and everyone. And dad, too. Of course I know why dad talks the way he does. He's scared he'll never get another job.'

'I'm thinking of joining up myself,' said Bette in a deliberately off-hand way. 'I've been reading *The Daily Worker* pretty hard these last few weeks.'

Phyl's first reaction was one of dismay, as though the announcement threatened her whole relation with Bette, and she blamed herself for raising the subject, as if it had been her remark that precipitated Bette's decision. 'I don't think I'd go as far as that,' she said weakly. 'I know dad's got bats in the belfry when it comes to communists. . . .' She found it oddly hard to say the word, but forced herself. 'But you can't deny it makes things hard for anyone who joins 'em. Oh yes, and there's our Matt—you know Matt—he's always talking politics; and as far as I can see, he says much the same as they do. But he thinks they're a foreign sort of show, and that it's best to keep in the Labour Party. Not that he's against them, as some are. He says they do good work for the most part, but he still doesn't think they can get on here. England's different, he says.'

'I haven't made up my mind yet,' said Bette. 'But I think I'll give it a try-out. You don't sign up for life, you know. If it doesn't turn out the way you thought, you can always drop out.'

'I'd be scared.'

George, who was passing, noticed them and paused with his broad smile. 'Hallo, girls, I saw you on the march.'

'Why aren't you on the platform?' asked Bette.

'I'm on my way there.' He smiled. 'Last night I was up at the Strand Palace, and the pickets persuaded three lorry-drivers to turn back with three thousand gallons of oil. "What'll I do with the stuff?" says the driver. "Pour it in the river and set the Thames on fire," says Madge, "then it might singe the backsides of some of those snotty-nosed shufflers in Parliament." "Okay, miss," says the driver, "but I think you're making things hot enough for 'em as it is." So he drove off.'

'Who's Madge?' asked Phyl.

'Just one of the kitchen-hands. Seems to put all the pepper on her tongue.' He waved his hand. 'It's a grand thing when you see the working-class in action. What's more, it's highly poetic, as you can see from these words of Madge's. If our so-called poets would stand in a few picket-lines, they might learn the finer uses of language.' He turned to go and said as a parting shot, 'And we need some fighting spirit and some fighting poetry. There's secret talks going on between the British and the U.S.A. Chiefs of Staff. Watch your steps, my dears. And tell the working-class.' He winked and went off at last.

'If he had a party, I'd join it,' said Phyl.

'He's a Quaker.'

'Yes, I know. But the other Quakers aren't like him. . . .'

She gave up talking as she saw Bette was trying to listen to the speech that was being relayed through a loud-speaker tied to one of the trees. For a moment she felt slightly hurt; then she, too, listened, looking round on the huge crowd, the intent faces serious and merry. And once more she felt herself part of this great thing which she only partly understood but which had entered irretrievably into her life. But this time the strain had gone. She had a tree at her back and Bette at her side, and the sunlight was sparkling over the myriad faces, while the voice flowed on, like the truth of struggle suddenly becoming articulate in all the dumb mouths of the world. The world within the world, the ghosts of the future taking body as the familiar comrades of everyday light.

When Phyl's fortnight at the shop was over, she was so taken up with meeting a series of family misfortunes that she had no time to think about finding another job. First Nell fell ill, and Phyl went along daily to help with the housework and look after the baby—Nell was expecting another in about five months. Then, as Nell got better, Mrs Tremaine had an accident: she sprained her ankle on the badly lit steps of the house. And so Phyl had to do the cooking and look after her mother. Finally, worst of all, Herb was getting more and more out of hand. He was now well in with Max Judkins' gang, strongly under the influence of Jim Cooper, a thin, quick-witted boy with a rat face, who came from one of the bad families of the neighbourhood. Mrs Cooper, a black-haired, vivacious woman, who always wore a scarlet coat or blouse, lived by prostitution in the many intervals when her husband was in jail. Six months ago he'd gone in for robbery with violence, and Mrs Cooper had taken to selling her fourteen-year-old daughter Iris as well as herself. Jim, her eldest son, was a year older than Herb, and people said that he touted for his mother and sister. He certainly traded in obscene postcards; for Phyl found one in Herb's pocket and burnt it before her mother saw it. Herb threatened her with the vengeance of the gang. 'Jim got half a crown for one like that,' he muttered sullenly. 'He says that when the American soldiers were here, he could have got five bob easy. I wish the Yanks would come again.'

Phyl boxed his ears, and he swore he'd tell Max—'and he'll fix you.' She remembered with shame how one night about two years ago she had come up the escalator at King's Cross with Kath, and there'd been half a dozen girls clustered round the top—girls no older than herself, with paint-smeared faces and big locks of hair pulled over one eye, offering themselves loudly to the American soldiers as they came up. For ten bob. She hadn't understood at first what they were doing, and she asked Kath, who laughed at her ignorance.

'Don't you dare say such a thing.'

'Why not?' asked Herb in astonishment. 'They're the chaps with the dough, aren't they? Max says he met one from Chicago who'd been in Al Capone's gang.'

'I'll tell mum about the postcard if you don't behave yourself,' said Phyl, feeling helpless.

'Yah, you burnt it. I'll say you made it all up. I'll say I saw you going with Iris. You keep your goddam nose out of this, or you might lose it.'

'You're just silly,' she cried, more helpless than ever. 'You're just a silly little fool who doesn't understand anything.'

But though that hurt him, she knew that he hadn't in the least been turned from his devotion to Max.

Bette came to tell her about the end of the strike. She was radiant at the general success. The managements had had to agree to T.U. organisation in hotels and restaurants, and no victimisation. 'I'm feeling on top of the world, Phyl.' Then she hurried off, admitting with a shy smile that she was going to meet Harry. Phyl was pleased. She'd felt ever since the first meeting that something had clicked between the two.

Tremaine was spending most of the day-time at the Public Library, in the Reference Room, where he dozed and made up football pools or worked out bets on horse-races that he hadn't the money to take up. Every day he calculated how much he would have lost or won if he'd had the money to lay; and he suffered anguish when he found that he'd backed a winner in his hypothetical bet. Once when he calculated that if all his bets had been actually laid he'd have won over a hundred pounds, he almost had a breakdown. His sense of having been cheated out of that hundred pounds left a permanent mark; and the detailed story of the money that should have been his, like abuse of Ted King for making him a cat's-paw, turned up at least once a day in his conversation.

'Luck's always been against me. If I hadn't got married, I'd have gone out to South Africa with Frank Penton; and look how well he did for himself.'

'Go on, say I sand-bagged you into it,' said Mrs Tremaine. 'Say I ured kidnappers. Go on.'

Everyone seemed in a bad way. When Phyl called to see how Pearl was getting on, she found her still curled up sulkily in her arm-chair.

'I don't know what's wrong with her,' said Mrs Rigsby when she took Phyl aside in the kitchen-shed. 'She's sickening for something. She just sits there, and reads and reads, and eats sweets. It's as well I gave

old Spincks a couple of budgerigars: he hands me things from under the counter, otherwise she'd eat up the sugar ration with a teaspoon and then complain I starved her. And I can't bear the way she crunches the sugar. I've got a mortal dislike of crunchings and munchings and all such noises, it's my one little fiddle-faddle. Why can't human beings behave like budgerigars? Though I suppose we would, if life was just one damn egg after another. Really, if it was the Lord who made our anatomy, as the Bible tells us, he must have started at our two ends, and by the time he got to the middle he had most of the important parts left over, so he had to cram 'em all together.' She whispered, 'Try to find out what's bothering her. She just snaps my head off.'

But Pearl wasn't easy to draw out. She listened to Phyl's meandering gossip with a remote air, shook her head impatiently now and then, and compressed her lips. And at last closed her eyes and yawned. When Phyl asked outright if she was ill or had something on her mind, she retorted angrily, 'Ma told you to ask that. Just tell her to mind her own business. The budgerigars are about on her level, the silly old cow. Why can't she stick to them?'

'You can't expect her not to be interested in her daughter,' Phyl demurred, hoping that Mrs Rigsby wasn't listening at the keyhole.

'She's never been interested in anyone but herself,' cried Pearl. 'Nobody is. I've been a fool, that's all.'

'Everybody seems at sixes and sevens,' sighed Phyl. She pondered. 'Everybody except Bette. She's all right.'

'Your wonderful Bette won't last long where she is,' said Pearl with a fury that bewildered Phyl. 'She'll be out on her neck, and serve her right, too.'

'But the terms said no victimisation.'

'I suppose you'll start growing up some day,' answered Pearl in contemptuous tones. She took up her book and put it down again at once. 'It's true about Kath and that boss of hers. She was in here the other day, throwing her weight about as if she was Hedy Lamarr and Katharine Hepburn rolled into one. He's going to have her trained as a manicurist, she says. Can you imagine it? All our Kath's dreams come true.'

'I'm going to tell her what I think about the way she behaved in the strike. She's a fool.'

'Oh, the strike,' said Pearl pettishly. 'And you're wrong about her. She isn't a fool. She's as hard as nails, and draws blood if you get hold of the wrong end.' She added viciously, 'I'll tell you something. It may help you to wake up in time. You know that Sam you were keen on last year.'

'I wasn't exactly keen on him. But he wasn't so bad.'

'Wasn't he? Well, that night he broke your heart through not turning up, Miss Kath had intercepted him, see. How do I know? She told me so herself. Oh, not in so many words. No, she said he came and told her how you were trying to tangle him up, and what a nuisance you were, and so she took pity on him, and one thing led to another, and he had such a forceful way about him, she was sorry for him because you led him on and teased him, and she thought that was awful of a girl.'

Phyl felt sick with anger and disgust. But as she stared into Pearl's face, she almost forgot her own feelings. Pearl was so obviously suffering, consumed with impotent rage. 'What's wrong?' she asked in dismay.

'I'm going to have a kid, you fool, you fool, you fool. . . .' Pearl clenched her fists and stood up, as if released from her invalid chair by the admission. 'I'm sorry for taking it out on you, but you're so simple sometimes, the way you believe anything you're told.'

'Can I tell your mother?' asked Phyl, all her own worries lost in her pity for Pearl. 'You know she won't hold it against you.'

'Of course I know it,' said Pearl. 'Only make her promise first that she won't fuss. I'll scream if she starts fussing and asking questions and wanting to do things for my good.' Then, as Phyl turned away, she softened. 'You know, you're too good for this world. You get my goat. It's a nice change once in a while, meeting someone like you, but if you let yourself be taken in too far, I'll screw your neck.'

'I won't, I promise you,' said Phyl earnestly and humbly.

For two nights Herb hadn't been home, and Mrs Tremaine was distracted. Tremaine, however, was dead against going to the police. 'We don't want those stunkers in on it. They'll only fix something and ruin us. I'm already down in their bad books through that squatting.'

'I can't just sit here and wait,' said Mrs Tremaine. 'How can you be so heartless? Herb may be dying somewhere, calling out for his mum and dad, and only strangers round him.'

'If anything's happened to him, it's happened. And if it hasn't, it hasn't. We can't help it either way. He'll come back when he's hungry enough.'

'I'll go and have another look round,' said Phyl. 'Don't do anything till I come back.'

'We won't do anything,' said Tremaine. 'And why? Because there isn't anything we can do. We're beaten.'

She felt that any action would be better than staying there amid the irresolute bickering and moaning. As she had no new ideas, she merely went once more on the rounds already traversed several times; she

even braved again the wrecked building where the secret cellar was, and the lane by the betting-pub.

'Honest, I don't know where he is,' said Max, who was lounging there. 'He's old enough to have a mind of his own, isn't he?' He eyed her up and down. 'If I did know, maybe I'd tell you—as long as you asked me in the right sort of way. I've kinda taken a fancy to you, Phyl.' He lowered his voice and leaned closer, with his cigarette-stub stuck to his lower lip. 'You and me could get on like one-o'clock, and you'd have nothing to complain of. Real American nylons, and silk knickers, too. Oh boy! Just say the word. I'm in the big money, no chicken-feed for me. And I like a moll with teeth.'

She left him without a word, and he lounged back with a gesture expressing his lazy belief that sooner or later, despite all efforts to raise her market-value by delays, she would succumb pleading to his charms. As she turned the corner she had a new idea which made her stop dead. She twisted her hands together, then drove herself on, across the road and up the side-street where the Coopers lived. She hesitated again. A dog with gnawed ears looked up from where it lay on one side of the doorway, yawned with a shake of the head, and then began searching for fleas under its hind leg. On the stairs someone had broken a bottle of tomato sauce, which scared her for a second with its likeness to blood; and on the wall, among various scribblings, was a fascist lightning symbol with the words *String up the Jews* only half rubbed out. Stepping over the smashed sauce bottle she went on up—past the door behind which a furious quarrel was going on, past the small girl sitting on the steps with her chin in her hands (who gave Phyl a fierce dumb stare), past a heavy smell of cabbage and a leaky tap, past chalkings on a cupboard with broken hinges (*Sam Rookes is mad* and *Will loves Mab*), past a baby's mess on a landing. A woman with thick protruding underlip opened her door and slammed it again. Phyl went on. She was even more afraid now of turning back.

'Come in,' said Mrs Cooper's pleasant, husky voice, with its slight lilt. 'Oh, it's you, is it? For the life of me, I can't remember your name, but I know your pretty face, lovie. What do you want?' She was dressed in an unbelted kimono and old satin shoes, with her hair tied behind in a blue ribbon.

'My brother Herb is friends with your Jim,' said Phyl in desperate appeal. 'He hasn't been back for two nights. I thought you might be able to help.'

'Iris,' Mrs Cooper called, 'look who's blown in.' And Iris, in brassière and pink stockings and nothing else, came slouching out of the inner room, and belched. 'Where's Jummy? I don't believe he's been in for a couple of days.'

'He hasn't.' Iris stared defiantly at Phyl. 'And good riddance, too. He's been getting too smart.' She belched again, and turned to her mother. 'Look how he got that ten bob out of the sailor, and what a hell of a time I had—'

'That was last week,' said Mrs Cooper. 'You better learn to let-up on things. Look at yourself, with a face like yesterday. Jimmy's all right. He works harder for his money than you do.'

Iris put out her tongue. 'You give me a pain. Wasn't it you that knocked him down the stairs because he wouldn't go and get the bottle of stout—'

Phyl expected them to start brawling, but Mrs Cooper merely laughed good-naturedly. 'He deserved it, didn't he? Come on now, make your friend at home.'

'Hullo, Phyl,' said Iris grudgingly. 'What d'you want?' She went over to the dishevelled double-bed, looked under it, and brought out a bottle of cheap wine. 'Want to wash your mouth out?'

'No, thanks. I came after Herb.'

Iris went out and returned with two tea cups, into which she poured what was left of the wine. 'If you don't want any, you needn't. All the more for us.' She belched, scratched herself and swore. 'Excuse the French.'

'No, Jimmy hasn't been back for a couple of nights,' said Mrs Cooper soothingly after a drink of wine. 'Now you mention it, I'm sure he hasn't. But don't you worry, Phyl my dear. It's no use worrying about other people. It gives you a headache and makes 'em worse. I said to Father Gregory the other day: Why do they call it Original Sin, Father—what's original about it? He told me I was a terrible sinner, but I saw a twinkle in his eye. Now, Iris, don't stand hanking there—put some clothes on and make yourself human.'

'I thought it was Gussy,' said Iris, sulkily sprawling on a beer-stained chair with a torn chintz cover. 'It's early yet.' She leaned over and took a cigarette from the table. 'I'll just have two draws and a spit.' She stretched herself. 'I wish Gussy'd come.' Phyl wanted to go, but she had a vague hope that Iris might know more about Jim than she'd said, and she felt that Herb must be implicated in whatever Jim was doing. Mrs Cooper went on calling Iris rude names, but in a way that encouraged her to boast and shock Phyl. At last Phyl could bear it no longer, she muttered something and moved towards the door; and Iris turned abusive. 'What are you looking at me like that for? I know more than you think about you and your Kath. . . .' She picked up her cup threateningly. 'I'll crown you.'

'Stop having kittens,' said her mother calmly. 'Some day you'll

learn that trouble comes along of its own accord without making it for yourself. Live and let live, I say.'

She was in one of her amiable moods. But Phyl had seen her carried off by half a dozen policemen, screaming and tearing their hair; and once she laid Meg Williams out with a bottle for trying to get away with that incompetent burglar Mr Cooper. 'You're sure you haven't any idea where Jim and Herb might be?' asked Phyl.

'They might be in heaven,' said Mrs Cooper with a benevolent grin, 'and they might be in hell. They might be in quod and they might be in Timbuctoo. But wherever they are, they're causing trouble for somebody.'

'I hope they've drowned themselves,' said Iris, yawning.

'It'll take more than water to drown Jimmy,' said Mrs Cooper. Then, seeing that Phyl had her hand on the door-handle, 'If ever you want to make up the rent for dad and mum like a good girl,' she concluded airily, 'just come along here, and don't let Iris upset you. I've taken a fancy to you. I wasn't so unlike you when I was your age. If anybody, barring Father Sweeney, had laid a finger on me, I'd have laid him flat.' She sighed. 'And that bitch Iris has taken the last cigarette that I was keeping for myself. Go on, dress yourself, you lazy lump of beef-steak, and fetch me some.'

Iris rose with a grimace and Phyl went out.

But that night at ten o'clock Herb came home. A scared and dragged Herb. At first he refused to say anything, sitting humped and wild-eyed in a corner, occasionally muttering. But at length Tremaine asserted himself and took off his belt. Herb whimpered, tried to bite his father's hand, and gave in.

He and three others, one of whom was Jim Cooper, had been hiding up in the deserted shed at the back of the barber's, with some food and beer (partly bought, partly stolen); and Jim worked out a plan for burgling a dressmaking establishment nearby. Max knew how to dispose of the stuff, and he'd put the idea into Jim's head; but he never took part directly in thefts or burglaries. The boys got in through a skylight which Jim said hadn't got a burglar-alarm attached; and everything went well for a while. They collected the clothes to be removed, under Jim's supervision, and were about to depart. But there was an alarm somewhere, and one of them somehow set it off. Herb wasn't sure, but he thought it must have been Charlie Ruppenshaw, who always had bad luck. He hadn't waited to inquire. He got back through the skylight, the next after Jim, with the alarm crashing away like ten fire brigades. Then he ran for his life, and here he was. 'I spit my death I won't do it again.'

Tremaine left him to his sulky whines in the corner, and walked up and down the room, sure that doom had at last descended on the family, the doom he had prophesied but hoped to escape. Mrs Tremaine tiptoed belatedly to the door to find if the Bandings had listened. Phyl sat on her bedding without a word, exhausted, feeling it was no use fighting for decency. Everyone let you down. She might as well sink to Iris's level and get some fun out of life for a few years. If the police come, she thought, I'll go to Mrs Cooper.

The police were on Tremaine's mind, too. 'They'll be along any moment now.' He stood over the cowering Herb with fists of fury. 'You done it. I wash my hands of you. I'll tell the magistrate I was made a cat's-paw, and he can hang you, for all I care.'

'Will they send me to Borstal?' asked Herb after a while.

'They'll give you hell. And if they don't, I will. You're not my son any longer. Bringing the police in on a decent respectable family. We're done for. We've come all unbuttoned. It's no use. I give up. A man's a fool. He gets married and tries to bring up a family. . . .' His voice took on more and more of a singing Cornish note as he grew worked up.

'Stop sky-hungry,' murmured Herb, getting some of his spirit back as no police showed up. Then came a knock on the door and he cowered away.

But it was only Mrs Banting asking for a pinch of salt. 'It's too late to buy any,' she explained, 'and father wants a drink of Bovril. He can't take it without a lot of salt, and that makes him thirstier than ever.' She tried to peer round Mrs Tremaine at Herb. 'Oh, so Herb's come back,' she cried, ignoring the fact that he'd had to pass through her room. 'That must be a weight off your mind.' As this gambit brought no success, she returned to the salt. 'D'you mind if I take a pinch?'

Mrs Tremaine, wrought up, couldn't resist an unusual asperity. 'You always took it before without asking. Why start being polite now?'

'Well, there's never anything happened in my family I'm ashamed of,' Mrs Banting retorted, with a suspicious eye on Herb.

'You be careful,' cried Tremaine, bustling up close. 'There's a law in the land still, and you better control that tongue of yours.'

'Oh, go and swallow yourself,' said Mrs Banting, and had the door shut in her face.

Phyl was still looking silently and inertly on. But as the door banged, she seemed to come to life again; and she knew that all those things she had been thinking about Iris and Mrs Cooper were nonsense. She'd always fight on, whatever happened. She hated her father

when he talked in a hopeless way. She'd never give in. And with her resolve to resist all the down-dragging forces that had closed round Herb and Iris and so many others, she remembered what she'd felt during the strike-march and the speeches in Hyde Park; and she was bewildered by the utter contrast between the degradations of the day and the conviction of freedom, happiness, pride, strength, which had flooded her on the Sunday of the march. There seemed no point of contact between those two worlds, that of helpless and recurrent misery and humiliation, and that of united song and determination to change the world. Here, in the wretched room, her father's moaning was the dominant note and seemed irrefutable; there, in the streets of the march and the gardens of the celebration, she had felt that the changing of the world, the ending of all that echoed in her father's moaning, was the simplest thing on earth. She had realised at the time the difference of her happiness from anything she had previously experienced; she had been upheld by a sense of revelation as all her old ideas about the world—the unbreakable nature of the bonds that wore you down and humiliated you—went up in smoke, leaving only the certainty that the marching throng, and herself in it, could achieve anything, liberate men and women from the dark snare. But she had not felt all that with the thoroughness she now felt, comparing the memory of the happiness with the present misery. For the first time she seemed fully outside that misery, seeing it from the outside as an ugly and unnecessary thing which must not be accepted.

But that did not mean a fight against it on the lines of Kath or Iris, Max or Dave—an acceptance of the dark forces in order to advance yourself by complicity in their workings. To rise or to escape by trying to be cleverer or dirtier than the others. Nor did it mean her father's sort of meek struggle, a weary effort to fit harmlessly in. No, it meant to keep outside it all in the way that she now felt outside, and yet to go on fighting at the heart of it all—as Harry, or as George the Quaker, were doing; as Bette was now trying to do. Phyl felt as if she had awakened from a long sleep, and for the first time saw men and women as they were, the world as it was. Because she saw the other thing, the world within the world, the deep struggle of change as well as the everyday adaptation.

'You didn't ought to put her back up,' said Tremaine, beginning to worry about Mrs Bantung and her malices. 'Now she'll go and tell on Herb. Even if he did throw the police off his trail, she'll go and give him away.'

Herb whimpered again and Tremaine turned round. 'Shut up, you, or I'll wipe you round the room. I'll teach you to spoil our good name.'

Mrs Tremaine said wearily, 'Oh, let him alone. He's had the guts

scared out of him. You'll be a good boy now, won't you, Herb?

Herb gave her a sly look, beginning to hope once more that a would be well. 'I won't get caught again doing a thing like that.'

Tremaine sank down with his face in his hands. 'I gave up, I don't my best, but I'm beat.'

Phyl, watching him closely, thought steadily: 'I'll never give in, no matter what happens. Never.'

8

Yorkshire

IDA HOPKINS was such an optimist, such a progressive, such a frequenter of committees, so wet with the muck of human kindness, that he felt bored, ashamed, and stung to ironic revolt. Yes, of course there had been trouble at the docks, but the Labour Ministry had ordered an inquiry and now everything was going to be settled to the satisfaction of all concerned. Yes, it was true the United States Fleet was in the Mediterranean, but, after all, they had to be somewhere, and soon there would be no further possibilities of war and so nobody would bother where warships were; probably they'd be used for meteorological observations in the Arctic. Yes, somebody had reported that eighty per cent. of the building work by private firms in Plymouth was black-market, but that was only a passing phase. Aneurin Bevan had the situation well in hand, and within four years Britain would have no housing problem at all. Such wonderful things were being thought out for the miners.

Still, she liked cream puffs even when the cream was a foul mixture of dried eggs and saccharine; and she got a piece of cream caught on her nose-tip without noticing, which relieved things till she saw herself in one of the slightly tarnished mirrors of the teashop, flushed, and wiped her nose in a tartan handkerchief.

And when they parted with her energetic handclasp still tingling in his fingers, he felt sorry for having derided her enthusiasms. She had the right ideas, even if she was rather stupid. You can't refuse to go on building a better world because all your fellow-workers don't own a fine wit and a sense of the ridiculous. Still he felt aimless as he walked on down the street, bought an evening paper, and saw that five communists were on trial for incitement to trespass. That interested him till he realised that it referred to the squatting, and a Ministry of Defence was to be created, with the three service ministries losing their

places in the Cabinet. What was behind that? No use expecting a newspaper to tell you. He crumpled the paper into his overcoat pocket and stopped to stare into a bookshop window. Books, so many books that he hadn't read, hadn't even heard of. What was the use of adding a few more to the unread titles?

He studied instead his reflection in the plate glass, and then the images of passing girls. Trapped in this flat watery dimension, the world and its women looked infinitely charming, returning in upon a hidden point of easy control, himself, his subtle eye and his undifferentiating flesh. All was delicately varied, all was equally acceptable. But when he turned and stared the world in its face, it became unmanageable, flawed, and confused, it ignored him, reduced him to an unwanted cipher; it moved outwards, away from his thoughts and desires, to incomprehensible ends and sudden corners, elusive and frustrating.

He stood a moment on the kerb, at a loss, wondering whether to take a bus or go on walking. A car drew up and its door opened. His father leaned out. 'Get in, Kit.' Only after he was inside the car did his father remark, 'I'm going home—does that suit you?'

'Yes,' he replied, staring ahead, aware all the while of his father's skilful driving, the easy running of the car. Feeling as if he'd been kidnapped, lugged from his own awkward world into this easy and powerful machine which expressed his father's dominance.

'Been working?'

'Yes.'

'Does it ever strike you that I might be interested?'

'I'm not so very interested myself.' At once he regretted the words. 'Sorry, but I don't inherit your speed of decision. I'm very slow-witted, you know.'

'That's a poor evasion. It may be true, but you yourself don't believe it.'

'If you know so much——' Kit didn't finish the sentence, overcome by the weariness that always weighed him down in conversations with his father. Why go through the tedium of completing a statement? They knew one another, his father and he, and whatever was said, the result would be the same. Then abruptly, with a sense of pleasant but unnerving danger, he realised that he now had something new up his sleeve. He had wanted to tell Ida Hopkins that he definitely had decided about joining the Labour Party, to tie himself to his proclaimed decision. Now, sooner or later, he'd have to tell his father; and that was what he wanted, what he dreaded.

Nothing more was said till the car crunched up the drive towards the garage. He opened the door, thankful and yet sorry that the show-

down had been once more postponed; and then his father remarked, 'After I've put the car away, come up to my room.'

He waited a quarter of an hour, trying to read *The New Statesman* competition, and then went up. His father was seated at the work-table writing. He looked up without speaking and returned to his work. To intimidate me, thought Kit. Old stuff. I suppose this is how one of the hands feels, sent to the office for a reprimand or the sack. For the first time, deeply in his bones, in his belly, he felt what his father's power actually was—the power to throw a man out of work, into despair and privation. This fear I feel, it's silly, but it's the fear of the hands on his pay-roll. It's not right: no man should have such power. For the first time the rebellious phrases he had used owned a precise and simple meaning. What was driving him into his rebellion was not the vague general reasons set out in his chat with Ida. No, it was this, nothing but this: the hate and fear he felt for the power expressed in his father's very voice, his walk, his eyes—the power to cross a man's name off the ledgers, off the lists of life. He sufficed and thought: I won't give in.

His father looked up. 'Why haven't you sat down?'

Kit wanted to refuse, but he sat down. 'You told me to come up.'

'You must think I have a very short memory,' said his father sarcastically. 'Well?'

Kit fought back the sense of guilt, of being on the defensive, that the unformulated question provoked. 'What do you want to know?'

'You know very well. I want to know what you mean to do with yourself.' As Kit sat silent, he went on, 'I have perhaps been too indulgent. I let you take the Arts course—'

'That was settled before—' Kit found that he couldn't mention John, after all. He stammered, 'At that time you didn't care what course I took.'

His father regarded him heavily with knitted brows. 'We can leave that point. What matters now is that you're my only son, and that you're needed at the mill. Do you think we Swintons have built the firm up for near a hundred years, to have you slide away into a useless existence?'

'Is every existence useless that isn't tied to the mill?'

His father answered coldly, 'Yours would be, and you know it. We are discussing you, my son, not mankind in the abstract. You lack the strength of character to build up anything new, whether in business or this arty nonsense of yours. But if you set yourself to it, in time you could become a reasonably efficient managing director of the mill. That is my opinion.'

'I'm afraid it isn't mine.' Kit tried to find some way of bringing the

discussion round to politics, so that he could shift the issue from the personal plane to the general. I'm going to join the Labour Party. The more he tried to envisage himself making that declaration, the more inadequate and flat it seemed—even though it would strike his father speechless with rage or make him roar with brutal laughter.

'You haven't really thought about it at all,' said his father sharply. 'I trust I'm no tyrant in my own home. If I saw you had a deep-rooted attraction to some other kind of work, I'd let you go. But you have no such attraction. You merely want to thwart my wishes. You're in a petty state of adolescent anarchy.' His voice was rising. 'That's all. You think it expresses character; but it doesn't. It exposes a lack of character. If I don't take you in hand, you'll go to the dogs.'

'In that case I'd better be off to them as soon as possible,' replied Kit, trembling with weak fury. Now was the time to speak up, but he couldn't bring himself to it. In a moment, in a moment. Let him have his full say first.

After a pause his father said slowly, 'Listen now. I don't want either of us to say things we'll regret—things we'd both never be able to forget. I'll give you a fortnight to decide where you stand.'

'An ultimatum.'

'Yes, if you like the word. Either you come into the firm or you get out and stay out—do what you like and keep yourself. I think you know me well enough to be aware that when my mind is definitely made up, I don't change it. If you decide to go your own way, all right, go it, but don't let me ever see your face again. And don't think that any pleas or tears will ever get you another farthing of my money. Do you understand?'

Kit nodded. He couldn't bring himself to speak. He'd either break down and weep, or say something unforgivable.

'All right. What's today? Friday. That gives you till the eighteenth.'

Kit nodded and went out. Only as he closed the door did he remember that he had said nothing of his political decision. With a feeling of dazed shock and relief, he walked on down the corridor—shock because the ultimatum had shaken him to the roots of his being; relief because at last the issue had been brought out into the open.

Joyce's door opened, and she stood there in her red dressing-gown worked with gold sunflowers. 'What was it?' she asked in a husky whisper.

He went to pass on, but her drawn face, her scared eyes, touched him to an unwonted pity. Above all, he wanted to talk to someone, anyone—even Joyce. 'Nothing about you.'

She stood back to let him in, and then closed the door, leaning against the wall. Is she imitating a stricken heroine on the films, he

thought, or are stricken film-heroines correctly imitating the phonies of real life? But at the same time he still felt an unwilling sympathy for her. Both she and he were the victims of their father's overbearing will and egotism. 'What was it, then?'

'Nothing much. We had a political argument. I thought it was time he found out I've a mind of my own.'

She stared incredulously. 'You're not hiding something?'

'Of course I'm not—'

'All right. Keep your wool on. Would you like a drink? Only take care there—don't sit on the bed! Can't you see I've got my things laid out?'

He smothered down an angry retort, and went back to the door. No, he didn't want any alliance with Joyce; he couldn't tell her anything. But already he felt better about the interview with his father

★

They came out of the New Theatre and went on down St Martin's Lane, talking loudly and excitedly through the theatre crowd about the play, *The Inspector Calls*. Brian grabbed the other two and drew them into the Salisbury, where he pushed his way through to the bar counter and ordered bitters. Colin and Kit stood near the door-curtain, trying to hear what the bearded man was saying to the group at the table on the right; his copy of *Polemic* was what had attracted Colin's attention. 'I absolutely agree,' he was heard to say in a slight lull, 'criticism should be as egocentrically artistic as the subject with which it treats.' The girl with a blue cloak and hair falling down her back leaned forward and drawled something.

Colin decided to start an intellectual discussion of his own. 'As for Priestley's play,' he said, getting shriller as he raised his voice, 'I find the whole thing illegitimate.' He stressed the last word so strongly that he almost screeched it, and gained a scornful glance from the blue-cloaked girl. 'Illegitimate,' he repeated. 'Like Chekov's *Seagull*, only more barbarous. When the naturalistic theatre began to die of sheer boredom, it imported symbols—just like a further inventory of socially significant objects. You put a curtain at the back of the scene,' he ran his palm up and down the curtain at his side, 'and everyone refers cryptically to a curtain that hides something. Symbol of Hypocrisy or Fear or what you like. Or you put a big vase on a table in the foreground, and the dull women of the dull play become women with a capital W. They become Womb.'

'I half get your point,' said Kit, more interested in the blue-cloaked girl than in Colin's argument. 'But the application?'

'A dull play about a dull middle-class family,' sneered Colin. 'Add

Knock on the Door. We've all heard of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. Then the dull inspector becomes Inspector with a capital I. The guik knocking at all our doors.'

'Well, yes,' said Kit. 'But why not? It seems a good idea to me.' He had shifted his interest from the blue cloak to a girl with a head of small tight curls, who was leaning back against a pillar with a glass of whisky while a short bespectacled man tried to stand on tiptoe and shout into her ear. She caught Kit's eye. He drank to her, and she slowly raised her glass, drank back, but did not smile.

'It's illegitimate,' said Colin.

'Well, a baby's none the less human if its parents weren't married.'

'Who? What? Where? When?' demanded Brian. 'Here, take the glasses before I drop 'em. I haven't got three hands.'

'Colin's thought up a thesis against the play,' said Kit. 'For myself, I liked it, without any theories.'

'So did I,' said Brian. 'I'd have preferred a little more poetry and pornography, as in all great art. But for our tame little world, it'll pass. May the Inspector knock tonight at all the million or two middle-class homes of our mighty nation where snore the smug and self-righteous families who live on the blood of the innocent.'

Kit was trying to get clear what it was that the play had strongly reminded him of as he watched it. Something which had then seemed indelibly printed on the forefront of his mind, and which had now quite faded out. The play's about my own family in a way, he thought, but that's not exactly what it conveyed. All the same, thinking of what he'd seen, he felt strengthened in his powers of resistance to his father's ultimatum. During the third act he had felt stirring deep in him a resolve at all costs not to surrender, not to take up a way of life that he considered wrong, unworthy of human dignity . . . yes, all that. The play released in him a faith in the large words, the noble words, which he had shrunk from making his own. Why are we so ashamed of a thoroughly good impulse? he asked himself in bewilderment, as if he had at last touched on the source of his own fears, shames, evasions, scepticisms.

'It's superficial,' insisted Colin. 'It puts a vulgar sociology in place of the true problem of good and evil. That problem is a religious one,' he added with a prolonged stammer at the word *religious*.

'So was *Adam and Eve* and *Pinchme*,' remarked Brian. 'If there'd only been half a dozen bawdy songs sung by Tom o' Bedlam, and the Inspector had turned out to be the Master Criminal, and the Father-of-the-family had been unmasked as Atlee, the heights would have been positively Shakespearean. As it was, drink and be grateful to little Mister Priestley, bless his heart of nine-carat gold, etcetera.' He sang:

*'In Yorkshire they say
that Mister Beasley Priestley will be King some day.*

Put down your glasses, lads, and let's hence. Towards Holborn, where the pubs stay open till eleven. And I know a lady.'

But in the street he stood still and snuffed the cool night air. Kit lingered at the door, to see if the lofty pillar-girl had anything to say with her eyes, but she was now talking to a bald man with a bushy beard. 'Where did you say we were going?'

'I've changed my mind—or rather our route. Let's go via the Strand, and see how things fare at that breeding-hole of Bolshevism, the Savoy.'

He led the way down past St Martin-in-the-Fields and Charing Cross. Colin wanted to go on talking about metaphysical good and evil, and got as far as citing from Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, bumping into a fatish girl who was dashing for a bus, and raising his voice as if urgently warding off a temptation. 'You can't throw the problem of guilt on to an external agency. That's only a projection of the inner fear. Socially significant literature is escape literature—terrified of the real pangs and conflicts of the spirit. You must hold fast. Face yourself in silence and suffering. . . .' He stammered and lurched against a post.

'We'll buy you a distorting mirror and a baby's dummy to suck in due time,' said Brian. 'But we he-men are tired of symbols and quimbols and jabberquackery in general. In a few minutes we'll see the Inspector and his minions at their normal knocking-jobs—knocking the heads of British citizens who make a stand against the ruling powers of cash and cant.'

They came up near the Savoy and crossed the road to where the policemen were keeping the pickets on the move. Just before they arrived someone must have answered back, for two policemen came out on to the Strand pavement dragging a man between them.

'What did I tell you?' said Brian.

Kit stood watching the pickets. One was a slender girl with a stoop and pale loose hair; and he felt a keen desire to know what she was feeling, to enter into her world. That world seemed to him something strangely unknown; dark waters sparkling with stars of antipodean discovery. I'll come to London, he thought. I'll break right away and come where I can get to know her, or the others who are like her. To embrace her, it seemed, would be like embracing the women of another planet, achieving a new sort of sensation, seeking union with unsuspected organs and rupturing mysterious hymens of contact. A frail and heroic body opening on new dimensions of adventure. The

odd and sustained excitement which his contemplation of the girl had induced was jarred by someone catching his arm. 'Why, it's Kit.' He turned and recognised Harry Manson, who had been on the same transport to India.

'Hallo, Harry,' he said, not sure whether he was pleased or displeased. 'I thought you'd gone back to the L.S.E.'

'So I have,' said Harry, with his slightly harsh voice. 'But that doesn't stop me doing a spot of night-duty here.' He moved on and beckoned to Kit. 'It's not safe to be too stationary. Down from Leeds, eh?'

'Yes, a B.A. with a second-class honours and no future.'

'There's no future for anyone in the rotten set-up,' said Harry, generalising what Kit had meant to express only his own personal sense of futility. 'But even England's on the move—believe it or not, as old Galileo said. You got home about a year earlier than I did. I've often meant to drop you a line. But things move so fast, don't they?'

Listening to Harry's cheerful voice, his casual words with their assumption of a shared view-point, Kit felt somewhat chilled. As a matter of fact, he did agree, more or less, with what Harry was saying; but he still didn't like the too-easy assumptions. The Savoy strike was a simple matter, yes, but you couldn't reduce the whole involved problem of post-war Britain to one of bringing an underpaid and backward section of the working-class into trade-union organisation. He looked round and saw that Brian was talking loud and fast to one of the pickets, while Colin moved about warily on the outskirts.

'We're just down for the night. Went to see Priestley's play. Perhaps we can meet and discuss things when I'm down for a longer stay.'

'I've been meaning to write to Gavin's sister,' said Harry. 'I thought of it again only yesterday. Did you ever write?'

'No, I wasn't with him as much as you were, anyway.'

'Still, we all had some good times together. . . .'

Suddenly Kit felt ashamed. Yes, they had had some good times together; but somehow in the army he had never noticed Harry's swarthinness, his slightly heavy lips, his over-confident manner, as he was now noticing them. Why? He didn't like to admit to himself that he shrank from Harry's friendliness because a Jew wasn't the same in the army as out of it. Not as far as personal relations went. He assured himself that his attitude had nothing to do with prejudices; the fact was simply that Harry was a bit tactless and presumptuous in his ways, a bit overbearing. And yet, as they talked, the very fact of Harry's voluble assumption of a close bond, based as it was in their common army experiences, was breaking down his resistances. After all, he felt, the sane way of life lay in the army experiences with their

elimination of so many matters which became ridiculous but sharp problems in the civilian world. Against his will he began responding to Harry's amiable premise that they were still held by an enduring bond, by shared ideas of revolt.

'Any chance of coming up to Leeds?'

'Not for the moment. But this meeting has made me feel we ought to keep in contact—you and me and Dick Baxter. I'll write to him tomorrow—I'm sure I've got his address somewhere. And Gavin's sister, too.'

He paused and began feeling in his pockets. A policeman, who was near in the shadow of the wall, came over and gave him a shove. 'Keep on, you're obstructing.' Harry stumbled against Kit, hurting his shin. Kit felt a burst of rage, against both Harry and the policeman. He stood aside and let Harry go on.

'See you sometime,' he called, and went back to the knot of spectators in the Strand. A man in a dress-suit with a woman cloaked in white fur turned the corner and went in towards the hotel, forced to walk because of the taxi-boycott. The man had his head a little lowered, but the woman held her head high, staring fiercely ahead. 'Canaille,' she said in a cold clear voice; and Kit felt both resentful of her behaviour and anxious to explain that he wasn't one of the strikers. He had seen the light shine a moment full in her face, which gleamed pallid-white with a strange opalline lustre playing round her eyes.

'Hurry, hurry,' said Brian, pulling at his sleeve. 'Holborn, wine and women. *Anglier*, beer and bitches. With any luck, we'll meet my lovely lousy Lucy, and she'll take us home to a supper of whelks and whisky.'

But Lucy wasn't there. Somehow Brian's brags never came off. 'I'll give her a tinkle,' he said, but came back from the 'phone shaking his head. 'She isn't in. No reply. But look at that red-head over there. Shall I snaffle her for Colin? Just say the word.' He drank a pint at a breath. 'Let's emigrate to Yucatan. It's a wonderful place to die in. But meanwhile we'll have a drink at the Starfish Club. I know the proprietress.'

But the door-keeper said the Starfish was full, or closed, or something. He had such a Polish accent and such a bad cold they couldn't follow what he said. Brian wanted to have another shot at Lucy, but the others voted that they'd call it a night. And they shouted down his suggestion of a night-train to visit a sculptor friend of his who kept two mistresses and a Jersey cow at Staines. I'll have to make up my mind by Friday, thought Kit with suddenly sinking heart. I'll come and write in London, even if it means starving. I won't humble myself.

★

That morning at breakfast Mr Swinton remarked coldly to Kit as he rose from the table, 'Come and see me at the works, three o'clock sharp.' Mrs Swinton half rose to follow him out, then sat down again with a sigh. Margaret and Di gaped and stared at Kit, who tried to appear nonchalant. Joyce, who for once had turned up at breakfast, in a tight-fitting jumper and pleated skirt, stubbed her cigarette and asked, 'What's it all about? Who's in trouble?'

'I'll tell you when I know.'

She gave an unkind throaty laugh, and Di asked what she was laughing at. Margaret, who hated Joyce, turned away and began telling her mother that she'd be delayed through hockey practice. Mrs Swinton placatingly asked Kit if he'd like more tea or fresh toast.

He went up to his room but couldn't read. Every creak or rustle of the house made him feel hemmed-in, circumscribed by his mother's humble presence, spied on by a myriad of family ghosts and derisive sisters. He took his coat and cap and went out.

Somehow or other he had to make up his mind; but whenever he tried to focus on the oppressive issue, his thoughts became vague, lost, slithering off into trivialities. He had a mocking conviction that everything was settled, anyway, so why bother? But settled along what lines, he wasn't sure. I won't give in: father always has his own way. The two propositions seemed equally incontrovertible, but which would win at three o'clock?

Walking didn't help him to think, and after a while he felt a need to discuss things with someone. Lately he'd made efforts to bring the matter up with Brian or Colin; but though he mentally rehearsed ways of introducing his problem and arguments which set out his determined position, he found that as soon as he neared the moment of disclosure he felt weak, demoralised, oddly ashamed. Besides, he knew what the others would say. Brian, 'To hell with dictators, draw out your savings and together we'll go to Tahiti.' Colin, 'It's a spiritual temptation to lose oneself in a delusive conflict with Authority instead of possessing one's soul in a fecund Silence.' All very well for them—Brian to urge the dream journey to Tahiti which he had no intention of ever carrying out; Colin to defend the security lacking in his own life, to suppress his jealousy by advising payment of the exacted price. They were both wrong, and right, and irrelevant. I want to enjoy all things, he thought, and to damn the world of dead convention in which I've been brought up; I want to keep my place in the world and be secure against hardships and insults. Well?

He tried to visualise the possible courses before him. To imagine himself thrown on his own resources, living a careless, drifting life, following some ideal of self-expression. To imagine himself marrying,

setting down with someone labelled by mother as a Nice Girl, going daily to the office, meeting the Leeds-Bradford mill-owners and wool-merchants of tomorrow as his father met those of today, shouting the same dull gossip with a note of bonhomie that hid a deadly keenness for every little detail turnable to profit.

Either course seemed unthinkable, without any connection with himself, the person walking along the suburban quickset hedges, garages, cypress rows, fences. With the clear ringing utterly complacent voice of some well-off woman coming across the barrier, commenting on the weather or the herbaceous border, calling a bored dog. Lawn-mowers purring across the soft autumnal sunlight, shears clipping, a car being got out, sparrows chirping in a rusted cypress. As if he were a fugitive from all this pointless nuddle-class comfort, which had come to represent the final degradation of the spirit. A fugitive passing along endless barriers, shut out, exiled, yet still imprisoned in the deadly maze. The suburban villas gave way to packed terrace-houses, grey knobly stone or sooted red brick, stereotyped in ugliness with their lace-curtains and doorsteps whitened with a block of sandstone, standing shoulder to shoulder in a solidarity of mouldering privation. Grey chapel-souls, perfect emblems of the alienation of man from himself and his fellows. . . .

And so all his efforts to think things out dissolved in a heavy incoherent rage against the world, against his father who was forcing him to decide in a matter that seemed to have no relation to his real self. His real self. what was it? After all, if this problem didn't touch him in his deepest needs, what did?

He kept on thinking that he'd catch a bus at the next bus-stop, but something drove him on. The regular movement began to calm him, though it brought no moral solution. Till at last, looking round, he found that he had walked almost into town.

His hands were clenched tight in his pockets. He unclenched them and decided to have coffee. Poised on kerb-edge, he looked round at his fellow-citizens as if seeing them for the first time. What was all the fuss about, the hurry, the worry, the fever, and the fret? Why did they inhabit this dark and sprawling monstrosity called a city when there were still bright and fertile spots of unspoiled earth? They seemed a skurry of gnats moving through complicated but meaningless sets of permutations and combinations, all mistaking the dark compulsive power for their own will, wandering home tired to sweaty beds of marriage and turning on the blithely lying radio for a breakfast reassurance that they were really immaterial souls.

Then the mood passed, he turned to the left. He felt that he was living in other time-planes, past or future, but not in the present, and

that his aimless movements were in truth the repetition of a pattern with great significance. He was looking for someone, or warily moving ahead of someone who hunted him. Someone. He went into a café, and remembered that he had been there before, with Helen Driver, four years ago, just before he was called up; and for once she had seemed wholly absorbed in what he was saying. Yes, that was the day when he had first really believed in himself, believed that he had something of his own to express. She had watched him with her large grey eyes and shaken her curls loose over her ears. And where was she now? She'd gone off during the last year of the war, nobody knew where. Perhaps she'd been as intelligent as he then thought she was.

He looked for the corner place, the leathern seat, where they'd sat. But now another couple were there, saying nothing and leaning back with shoulders touching. He went over to the window. But a trail was lost in his mind; and when he'd drunk his coffee and smoked a cigarette he went out. The couple were still in the corner, saying nothing, happy.

In the next street he passed a large block of offices, paused and went back *Jenson, Jenson, Thrupp and Honiston, Solicitors*. He hesitated, then climbed the dusty stairs to the second floor. 'Is Mr Jenson in?' he asked the pimply lad with oiled and waved hair, who rose from a small table amid walls lined with tin boxes.

'Appointment?'

'No, I'm his cousin. I was just passing. . . .' He glanced round at the tiers of boxes with the names of clients written in copper-plate of white paint.

'Mr Jenson only sees by appointment,' said the lad with pert pleasure in getting rid of an unauthorised intruder.

Kit was turning away when one of the inner doors of heavy oak opened, and Jenson appeared, ushering out a small bald-headed client, who went on protesting in a prolonged stutter, 'Yes, of course, yes, yes, of course, then then—'

Jenson blandly shook hands and turned to Kit. 'Hallo, Kit, what are you doing here?' He coolly and amiably waved the client out. 'Yes, Mr Gettering, what is legally possible will be done.'

'Just a letter to s-s-s-scare him,' exploded the client.

'We'll do our best for you.' Jenson took Kit by the arm and drew him into his private office. 'Haven't seen you for ages. Six months, to be precise, I think.' His eyebrows, skilled at registering the smallest quavers or queries of legal apprehension, showed a faint curiosity.

'Take a seat, my dear boy.'

'I don't want to take up your time—'

'A quarter of an hour.' Jenson compared his wrist-watch with the

solid marble clock on the solid marble mantelpiece. 'My next client is a very punctual man. Also a very rich one, whom it would be fatal to disoblige. So a quarter of an hour.' He took up an ivory paper-knife and held it delicately between his two hands.

He was only in the early forties himself, the Son of Jenson become Jenson himself after his father's death about two years before. Kit wasn't sure why he'd come. He and Jenson weren't so friendly as all that. Jenson was a well-read man, and they'd had many pleasant but rather vague chats on literature, and once, about five years ago, they had spent part of a holiday together in Westmorland. 'I suppose I've come for professional advice . . . more or less,' he said slowly, and felt a certain relief at the fact that he'd now have to tell everything, or at least part, of what was on his mind. He found his handkerchief and blew his nose.

'What is it? Summons for speeding?' Jenson laughed and tapped himself on the nose with the paper-knife. 'Don't say it's breach of promise.'

'Not likely. You see . . .' Kit flushed. 'I didn't come up here with the intention of wasting your time. I'm just trying to think things out. I've got to do something till three o'clock.' He felt Jenson's shrewdly assessing eye upon him. 'All the same, I'd be pleased at your advice. . . . It's the old thing. . . . Father's at me to go into the works.' He paused abruptly.

'A rather stronger pressure than formerly, I presume,' said Jenson encouragingly.

'Yes. . . . In fact he's delivered an ultimatum. Out I go and make my own way in the world, or in I come and carry on the family name and all its crimes.'

'An ultimatum—till three o'clock?'

'That's it. And I don't know what I'll say. Tell him to take a running jump at himself, I hope.' He smiled. 'And the joke of it is that I'm now a socialist—though he doesn't know it. Do you think I'm going soft in the brain?'

Jenson smiled in turn. 'As this seems the moment for confessions, I'll tell you something, though you'd better not repeat it. I nearly voted Labour at the general elections. My father, you know, was a staunch Liberal of the old breed. Underneath he had a simple belief that all men were good at heart, and that free trade, *laissez-faire* in all the relations of men, must add up somehow and sometime to equality and fraternity. Well, I've lost his dogmas, but I've kept at least a fraction of his faith. And when I faced the ballot-box last year, I felt my father at my elbow telling me to take the risk and vote Labour, even though he had always been a thorough anti-socialist. The people are

stirring, refusing to shoulder the old burdens, I told myself. If the Tories get back, anything may happen—even a revolution. I kept recalling that poem of Chesterton's: For we are the people of England and we have not spoken yet. . . . Well, I lost my nerve and voted against Labour after all. But I think I was wrong.' He spread out his hands. 'Now hold your tongue or you'll wreck my credit. But I thought you had a right to hear all that.'

Kit felt an overwhelming emotion of gratitude and ease. Even if Jenson was making his confession up, to help Kit out of his sense of guilt, somehow the world seemed different than it had been five minutes earlier. 'Well, what do you advise me to do?'

'I certainly shan't advise you,' replied Jenson, settling back. 'But I'd like to say a few words. If you feel sure in your own heart there is something you desperately need to do—a course that you must follow unless you are to remain frustrated and only half yourself—then carry on at any cost. But don't cause both yourself and others a lot of suffering for nothing in particular. Take myself as a minor example of what I'm saying. You know I rather like sketching. . . .' He broke off and put the paper-knife down. 'But I needn't go into that.'

'I want to be honest to myself and others,' Kit began and then grew confused. 'I suppose the problem only arises because I'm not sure of myself. I have my beliefs—and at moments I feel that they're all that matters and that they've gone deep. But as soon as I have to stand up for them, I begin to feel apologetic, uncertain, ironic. I've just said I'm a socialist, and it's true. But not so much because I like socialism as because I dislike all other alternatives even more. Socialism as an idea, yes. But the Labour Party—well, the more I look at it, the more I see the old devils with new fake-haloes round their horns.'

'There's a lot of truth in that, of course,' said Jenson cautiously. 'But all the same—'

'Yes,' said Kit with a touch of bitterness. 'But all the same. . . . That's how I feel. A rather tepid feeling, when you actually take its temperature. And yet it's genuine enough to turn my world topsy-turvy. How, then, can I enter the works and prepare for the day when I'll step into father's rather muddy shoes? I may not subscribe to the cartoon stuff about the bloated capitalist; but I don't see how I can be a socialist and the managing director of a big mill at the same time.'

'I don't see why not,' said Jenson. 'Even the most zealous socialist would admit that the country's industries must be kept going till the day of nationalisation. And supposing that that day is a good way off, wouldn't it be better for the men to have someone in charge who was sympathetic to their claims?'

'I've thought of that,' said Kit eagerly. 'But if there's really an in-

compatibility'—he blushed and swallowed the words—'a basic contradiction between capital and wage earnings—and if there isn't, there's no point in socialism—then you can't really arbitrate.'

'I think that runs counter to the ideas of many of the leaders of the Labour Party. Unless I'm mistaken, they're very keen on various arbitration schemes, mixed corporations of all sorts, and the like. I don't think they're very hot-headed, you know. We can rely on them to do nothing precipitate. Besides, there are all sorts of sharing projects and the like you could take up.'

'Yes,' said Kit doubtfully, 'I suppose so.'

There was a pause. Kit studied Jenson's calm, high-browed face, trying to make out what he really thought. Suddenly he had an idea. He sat up. 'Yes?' said Jenson.

'It struck me I could keep my self-respect if I agreed to go into the firm, but told father at the same time that I'm a socialist and that I mean to stick to my views.'

'That would probably be best for all concerned.' There was a knock on the door. 'And now, my dear boy, I fear you must go. I do hope it has helped you to come and chat with me. I don't need to stress how flattered I am. . . .' As he spoke he held Kit's arm and led him doorwards. 'Remember me to the others, especially my aunt, your good mother. Tell her I'll drop in one night soon. . . . Very busy. . . . He wrung Kit's hand and left him, turning to the tall heavy man who was waiting impatiently to enter. 'I haven't kept you waiting, have I?' The marble clock began chiming the quarter to the hour, as if in vindication of the firm's respectful punctuality. 'Come in, please, Mr Maccles.'

Downstairs, Kit dawdled a moment reading the names on the brass plates, then set out walking. This time he walked more lightly, happily, though with momentary checks and waverings.

'You're exactly on time,' said his father. 'That's good.' He sat back in his swivel chair of dark-blue leather, glanced at Kit, then at his orderly table of unvarnished oak and chromium fittings. Before him were ranged a square ink-pot, trays of In and Out with only one or two letters, a plastic ash-tray, a telephone.

Kit had meant to sit in quiet dignity till his father begged him for an answer, and then to state his acceptance slowly, step by step. But the pause set his nerves on edge. He fidgeted under his father's stare. 'Well, I'm ready. . . . I mean I'll come and work here. . . . I mean. . . .'

His father answered clearly, without excitement, looking him full in the eyes. 'Thank you. I'm glad you've come in that spirit.'

Kit was further confused by his father's unemotional reception of the news of surrender. 'But there's something I ought to add.'

'There can be no conditions,' Mr Swinton said a trifle sharply, but maintaining his composure.

'I suppose you know I'm a socialist,' Kit blurted out, feeling both foolish and acutely resentful.

His father stared for a moment, then leaned forward. 'What does that mean exactly?'

'It means . . . I don't believe in the way things are . . . and that I support the Labour Party.'

His father said nothing for a moment; then he took his cigarette-case from his pocket and offered Kit a cigarette. Kit wanted to refuse, but took one. His father also took one. Kit produced his lighter, and lighted his father's cigarette, then his own. Is he doing this to gain time? he thought. He himself was determined not to speak first. He had begun the interview feebly; but now that he had made his defiance, he felt more assured, though with a certain tremulous tensity under his calm. He did not like to keep staring at his father, but noted that his face had gone bleaker and heavier.

At last Mr Swinton spoke. 'Very well. We shan't argue about that. Not now, anyway. I think you're behaving stupidly. But if you abide honourably by your promise to come into the works, I shan't attempt to dictate your behaviour outside. Only, you understand you must not use your privileged position here for any political purpose. No one is permitted to do that.'

'Of course.'

They sat silent in the pale diffused autumnal light of the plate-glass window. Kit felt a burst of relief, of triumph, which almost at once gave way to a fresh uncertainty. Had he beaten his father, or had he fallen into a trap from which there was henceforth no escape? Was his father's expression a heavy mask of rage or an admission of check-mate? Was his acceptance of the compact a genuine one, or was it a false truce behind which a fresh ambush was being prepared? Was he temporarily rattled and at a loss, or was he doing his difficult best to realise that Kit had a will of his own? Kit's fear gave way to a certain tenderness, a feeling that he had made his defiance, not as a real statement of convictions, but as a mean act of revenge; and he fumbled about in his mind for a phrase of reconciliation, which he could not find. He knew too little of what was going on in his father's thoughts at this moment, hate and guile, or desire for mutual understanding.

Mr Swinton rose, crushing the remains of his cigarette in the ash-tray. 'I'll take you in to see Mr Penning—he's in charge of personnel. I'd like you to get some idea of the way the whole business is run before you come into the main office.'

Tyneside

THE QUEUE AT the greengrocer's in the Bigg Market was about a dozen deep when Jean Emery joined it. A grey mottled sky, and enough chill already in the air to make waiting in a queue uncomfortable as well as tedious. Ahead of Jean was old Mrs Watt with her ancient bonnet of jet beads, giving her head a little shake every now and then; and ahead of Mrs Watt was young Kate Toms, married only a month ago, Mrs Jackson now, if you please, going messages for herself and not for her mother, Mrs Toms, who was always drawing attention to the fact that she'd borne all her children in the month of January. How I'm getting on, thought Jean, I can remember Kate a bonny brat of seven or eight with her bloomers coming down at the club outing and breaking her ankle at litchy-dabber in Puvis Lane; and now she's a married woman. 'Hullo, Mrs Emery,' said Kate, turning round, 'I thought someone was looking at me from behind. It gives me the wiggles in my shoulder-blades.' And she wriggled to show how she felt.

'Goodness me,' said Mrs Watt, who was too deaf to hear what had been said, 'have you got a flop on you, hunny?'

'How do you like married life?' Jean asked Kate. 'It's the first time I've seen you since the great event.'

'Took to it like a duck to water,' said Kate with another wriggle. 'We had a lovely time at Whitby. You know Steve's aunt gave us the cottage she lets in the summer months. A bit of luck, somebody died and a booking fell through. Canny old soul she was, too; came up every day to see how we were getting on, and said I looked too young and innocent for words.'

'She doesn't know you the way we do.'

'Yes, it's a bliddy disgrace what we have to pay,' said Mrs Watt in her high-pitched quavering voice, giving her bonnet a sharp shake. 'A shilling a pound for sprouts, and a mouldy fly-bitten lot at that.'

The woman who had just finished buying came down the queue, Nancy Drew. She opened her bag to Mrs Watt and Jean. 'Eee, look—three and nupence ha'penny. It'd have cost under a bob before the war.'

'And two bob six months ago,' observed Jean. 'That's what comes through taking the controls off.'

'And why did they take 'em off?' asked Nancy. 'The price of jam is going up, too.'

'So is dried eggs,' said Kate shrilly, anxious to seem well up in all matters of housekeeping. 'It's a crying shame.'

'You'd have expected it from the others,' said Nancy, who was wearing a red coat and had her black hair cut page-fashion. 'But why does a Labour Government do it?'

'You go and ask Ernie Bevin,' said Jean. 'Only don't stab him in the back with a cucumber. He's got a very sensitive back, like young Kate here, and it's all stuck with knives and daggers where ungrateful folk like you and me have caught him bending.'

'Cabbage sixpence a pound,' quavered Mrs Watt to Kate, who was now nearing the head of the queue. 'Don't you pay it, hinny.'

'You hold your mouth, Mrs Watt,' shouted the large lazy-looking woman who was putting potatoes into the scales. 'Don't you go leading her astray.' She smiled at Kate. 'I only wish I got the money, but I don't.' She poured the potatoes into someone's straw-bag. 'Here y'are, hinny, a lovely cabbage for you. Got as big a heart as I have myself.'

'What's that? What's that?' asked Mrs Watt, shaking her jet beads with much animation. Kate turned to speak to her, but the woman who had come up behind Jean now intervened.

'What can you expect with a government like this?'

Her words weren't so very different from what the others were saying, but her tones were. They were the superior tones of the golf-and-bridge middle-class; and the queue at once reacted with resentment. Ready to criticise the Labour Government with all the strength of their lungs, they weren't going to hear this sort of superior person make capital out of their grudges.

'We expect a lot,' said Jean. 'That's why we complain. We expect a certain sort of useless buggers to get well and truly soaked. You can bleat as long as you like; and if I only thought you really had something to bleat about, I'd forget my own sorrows.'

'Some people come down here, hoping to get things cheaper,' said Nancy. 'They think they own the world.'

The interloping middle-class woman, who was dressed neatly in a grey tailored suit, refused to be talked down. 'It takes a good businessman like Lord Woolton to run things. I'm not blaming the government, because they don't know how to govern. You can't put a pack of jumped-up ignorant creatures into office and expect them to administer a country like England.' Her voice grew tremulous with excitement as she persisted, nervously vicious.

'If I was you,' said Jean, 'I'd get going while the going's good. You've come to the wrong shop to sell that sort of goods.'

'This is a free country as yet,' said the woman bitterly.

'That's what I meant. We might start saying what we think of you. You can't gag us yet.'

The woman squealed. Nancy had accidentally trodden on her toes.

making way for Kate to pass. 'That's assault and battery,' she cried, limping out from the queue. 'I'll call the police.'

'That's right,' said Jean soothingly. 'You go right away and find a nice policeman.'

Nancy turned, not quite sure what had happened, and the woman stepped back in fear. A shopping-bag with tins of fruit and meat dropped down and the tins rolled out. The woman pursued the tins, half-sobbing, half-blustering. Her tight-fitting dress didn't make it easy for her to bend down. Kate was going to help, but Jean caught her arm. 'Keep your kind heart for the devils in hell, but not for a middle-class female with Lord Woolton on her lips.' She let Kate go and went up to the woman. 'Quick, off home before you find something worse to complain about. Someone put you up to this tomfoolery. You haven't got enough brains of your own even to be stupid.'

'I'll call the police,' cried the woman, now haggard and wild-eyed. She shook her fist at Jean and hurried away.

'But she may have really come to get her messages in the Market,' said Kate.

'Don't you think it,' said Jean. 'She was a saboteur. One of the Housewives' League or whatever they call themselves.' She looked round with a broad smile and dusted her hands. 'All right, lasses. Now she's gone, we can curse the government ourselves. I'll begin. God damn and blast their dirty souls for a lot of crawling lickspittles and imperialist lackeys.'

'That sounds a bit strong to me,' said Nancy, lingering to see the end of the trouble. 'I don't know what it means, but it sounds awful bad. Where did you learn such language?'

'Bless you, I didn't learn it. I was born in Glasgow. My father used to talk like that when he was making love to my poor mother. And as for the strength of my remarks, the day I'm proved wrong I'll be the happiest woman in Britain and I'll kiss Cripps's big toe.'

'What happened?' asked Mrs Watt, mystified by the rout of the Housewife-Leaguer. 'Did she try to pinch someone's turn?'

'Do you want to be served, Mrs Watt, or don't you?' yelled the proprietress.

'No, no cabbages,' said Mrs Watt. 'I couldn't digest 'em at that price. They'd lie like a sin on my conscience, Mrs Targit.'

He signed the last letter and handed the whole batch to Miss Pickering, who stood awaiting further instructions. Leaning backwards in the tilting chair, he tapped his teeth with the end of his fountain-pen. He liked these moments of silence with Miss Pickering, when she stood

so submissively and alertly waiting on his will, and he studied her slim figure and her large-boned face with its fine uncosmeticked complexion. His glances were rendered innocuous by the assumption that he was in a deep meditation over business matters. Miss Pickering wore, as usual, a big silver brooch in the front of her blouse, preventing the V from opening out too far. This brooch-guard gave him the feeling that the V, if left to itself, would reveal as much as a Hollywood poster of a heroine struggling in vain for her virtue; and one day in the height of summer he had come in hastily and found Miss Pickering without it. There lay the brooch on the table by her typewriter, and she was typing; but she had her back turned, and when she rose with the papers, she had managed to slip the brooch back to its sentinel place.

'I think that's all.'

She half turned away but did not go. As if those customary words were an order: Half-turn! He wondered how far her submissiveness would go. What if he said next. Take off your brooch, Miss Pickering! Or, unbrooch yourself, Barbara! The sun came out a moment and unrolled a carpet of gold on the floor near the window; then went in again as suddenly.

'That'll do.'

She turned away, and he rose, pleased at his agility. A man had to watch himself in an office job, or he'd get flabby; and apart from the personal disadvantages, a paunch meant giving a handle to the shop-stewards who were gunning for him. His lips tightened. Two more years and he'd consolidate his position properly. It was Wilkins who started the whispering campaign, all through that old grudge which went back to days at Clayton's; he was the one who said Emery had sold out in the first post-war discussions on dilution. And think how I sweated to get Chapford's to accept the modifications in their proposal! I came out of those negotiations with as clean hands as ever a man could have, reflected Emery, moving with a frown over to the window, and what did I get? Did I get any thanks? Did I even get a plain acknowledgment? No, and I'd almost wrecked the negotiations by sticking out as long as I did.

He felt Miss Pickering watching him. He swung round, and she at once dropped her eyes. 'I'm going out now,' he said curtly. 'I won't be back till about half-past three or four. I'll probably run over to Hobson's.'

'They rang up twice from Crow's,' she reminded him.

He waved Crow's away. 'It's some trivial matter. I really can't afford the time just now. There's a dozen other more important things. I must concentrate at the moment on Hobson's.' He went towards the door and in passing laid his hand on her shoulder. 'Okay, Barbara.' He

made a point of calling her Miss Pickering except at moments like this, when starting or ending work, with no one else about; it gave a slummocky impression to go calling everyone around by their Christian names, as Jim Oliver did. He felt her slight shoulder-bone through the thin blouse, and wondered how many underclothes she wore. She'd be sure to wear things like the lingerie advertisements, not like Jean's serviceable etceteras, which she insisted on mending as long as they'd hold together. Once, flush after some luck at the dogs, he'd given her five pounds and told her to buy something expensive for herself, and she'd come back with a pair of blankets and several tins of paint for the outside woodwork.

The telephone rang, and he felt Miss Pickering's well-trained body give a slight jump. He moved to the door. At the 'phone she was saying, 'Yes . . . yes . . .' and turned with her hand over the mouthpiece to tell him who was ringing. But he shook his head, smiled, put his finger to his lips, and went out.

In the corridor it struck him that the lip-gesture might have seemed like blowing a kiss, and he wondered if Barbara Pickering had taken it that way. It was pleasant, he thought, to have a slight edge of sex stimulation between him and the typist, but to go further and get entangled was dangerous, might lead to a scandal with all sorts of repercussions.

Outside the front door he turned left, for the nearest pub. He was beginning nowadays to feel the need of a whisky about this time. In the morning, get rid of the routine stuff, the odd matters, the ragged detail that left you confused and irritated if you let it weigh on your mind. Then have a whisky, which wiped out the confusions, the uncertainties, the trivialities, and set a tone on the mind, a tone of assurance and easy power. A sense of distance from the noisy wrangling world which wanted to drag a man down, tie him up in all sorts of knots and finally jerk him off his balance. A sense of being secure above all that, dealing at leisure with whatever major issue was referred one's way. And then, with a day rounded off by another whisky or two, return home with the conviction of a strengthened position.

And then Jean spoils it all, he thought, quickening his pace. He turned into the Saloon Bar. Of course the day didn't always work out like that. But the great thing was to have a system, to keep on subduing the unruly irruptions and criss-crossings of chance and malice to the pattern of one's will, one's extending power. And it's not for oneself, he said in answer to some adversary in his mind whose voice was like an echo of Jean's voice, it's not for oneself that one wants to stabilise this system. What use is one for the men if one lacks resolution and a sense of power? Every day one is dealing with the boss-class, who

have all the resolution and power-conviction that's ingrained by centuries, thousands of years, of being on top of things, on top of people. One can't beat such persons with a few cheap demagogic phrases and some doctrinaire formulations about value and surplus-value. No, they're wily old birds, absolutely sure of themselves, sure of their class's divine rights; one has got to beat them at their own game, gradually build up a system of tactics, a technique of power that gets them down for all their scheming and wriggling.

With confident stride he went over to the bar. Against the tiers of gleaming bottles and mirrors stood Dolores, a dark Irish girl who had been told by somebody that she must have Spanish blood; she wore her hair with a long sweeping curl plastered over each cheekbone, and spoke with a broad Donegal brogue. The gracious haste with which she moved to get Emery his whisky enhanced his sense of well-being; he had felt for some weeks that he'd made a bit of a hit with Dolores.

'Sure and I don't need to ask you,' she said as she put the whisky before him. He lifted the glass towards her and sipped. 'Did I tell you I'm getting a week off before Christmas?' she went on. 'I know my mother will never be forgiving me if I don't travel home to see her, for it's near the end she is.' She crossed herself. 'Yet if the truth is told, it's a long and wearsome way to go, and she may well be dead before I get there.' She crossed herself again.

He had a suspicion that she was fishing for an alternative proposal; but if she thought he'd take her away for a week, she was mistaken. 'Well, you don't have to make your mind up yet,' he said.

'I only wish someone would make it up for me.' She leaned nearer, with a stench of cheap violet scent. 'For if I'm left to myself, I dilly and I dally till my head goes round.'

Now if it was Barbara behind the bar making a proposition like this, he thought, I might consider it. But a man mustn't get entangled too near home. Things backfire that way. He looked round to see if any acquaintances had yet come in. Two men whom he vaguely thought he recognised entered and stared about: they seemed daunted a bit by the splendours of the Saloon—must have thought it was the Public. But instead of going out, they came over towards the bar—towards Emery himself.

'Brother Emery,' said one of them, sticking his cap in his pocket.

'That's me,' said Emery, holding down his annoyance.

'Thought we might find you here,' said the second man, who had a scar down one cheek and a disrespectfully twinkling eye.

'Who told you?'

'Shall we tell him, Hugh?' said the man with the scar. 'Yes, we will. He winked at Emery. 'You weren't in your office. The porter said

you hadn't been gone long. We tossed whether we went left or right, and we went left. We looked in the first pub, and here we are.'

'Well, what is it? I've got to go in a moment,' said Emery, assuming his best official manner, amiable without being too familiar. Short without being sharp.

'We're from Crow's,' said the man with the scar.

Emery controlled his impatience. 'What'll you have?'

'Half a bitter,' said the other man, who had a snub nose and thick freckles. 'Two half-pints,' he called to Dolores, who had come up close to hear what was being discussed. 'No, I pay for this,' he said to Emery. 'What about yourself?'

'I'm all right,' said Emery. 'Come over here.' He led the way to one of the tables near the big fireplace of shiny blue bricks with brass warming-pans hung at the sides. 'What is it, lads?'

'We ducked over straight at the lunch-break.'

'We couldn't get you on the 'phone.'

Emery waited, staring into his whisky glass. 'Well, what is it?'

'Bonus disagreement.'

'They've put an unskilled man on a skilled job to cut the rates.'

'And you've had him off it?' asked Emery.

'The dispute's going on.'

Emery sighed. 'I know. The management said that you didn't do this sort of thing during the war, and you said the war's over.'

'That's right. Well, we register a failure to agree, see?'

'You've sent in a written report?'

'Yes, it's in the post. But we don't want to wait for the District.'

'So you want me to come over and argue it out?'

'Naturally. It's the thin wedge of dilution—and not the first try-out. Oh no. But so far we've kept one move ahead.'

Emery drank some whisky and couldn't resist saying what was in his mind with more contempt than he meant to show. 'Well, why not fight to get the rate for the man on the machine?'

There was a pause. The man with the scar answered. 'It's all very well to say that. But it's lowering standards. It's giving the management the sort of chance they like.'

'You got to think of apprenticeship and time-served men,' said the other. 'It'll bugger everything up if we let 'em put untrained men on a skilled machine. After a while they'll say that anyone can do anything, and to hell with the rates.'

'All the same, the test of skill is the rate,' persisted Emery. 'You haven't said the man was failing to do the job.'

'We've registered failure to agree,' said the man with the scar truculently; and Emery saw he'd gone too far.

'Don't take any notice of me, I was just joking. I wanted to see what you'd say. We've got to fight for all the safeguards we've won while there's a management—'

'Till the cows come home,' said the man with the scar sarcastically. Emery recognised him now, Jack Benson, one of the stewards who'd led the faction in his branch against him, Emery, at the election. I had better be careful, he thought, this bastard has come on the look-out for something to use against me. He drained his whisky and took on a more business-like tone.

'Right, lads. You go back now, and I'll be over the moment I can. I can't go straightway. I've got an appointment at Hobson's. I can't postpone.' He stood up. 'Have another beer before you go. On me this time.'

The man with the scar shook his head, though his companion had half-nodded and grinned acceptance. 'We can't wait now. We've been longer than we meant already. Well, we'll be seeing you.'

The other added, 'We tried to get you yesterday. It's probably too late now to go on the agenda of the next Works' Committee. That ought to have gone out this morning.'

'Well, it can't be helped,' said Emery.

They went off. Blast him, thought Emery, he didn't even say thank you. He tried to remember anything further of the man, who was now taking on the hue of one of his sworn enemies, the underground in the Union that'd try to dislodge him in two years' time. What's he got against me? I can't think of any time I trod on his toes.

He realised that he was clenching the whisky glass tight between thumb and forefinger. He was about to put it down on the table, but instead he went back to the bar. Without inquiring, Dolores brought the bottle and refilled the glass. She leaned over, and this time the violet scent, mixed with the smell of her sweat, didn't displease him. 'One damn thing after another,' he said. She leaned closer, moving her lips as if rehearsing something important that she wanted to say; but the door swung open and Clayton came in with Gilchrist. Emery turned with relief to Gilchrist's yelp of laughter, his resounding thump of good-fellowship.

'Quick worker, eh?' He banged on the counter. 'Drink up, Emery. Three whiskies, Dolores. Gather round, I've just heard a good one.'

★

There was nothing for him in the letter-rack: Jean hadn't written. He felt both relieved and annoyed, went towards the lift, hesitated and then turned towards the cocktail bar. After getting rid of the bore from the District, he had meant to go straight up to his bedroom. But as

soon as he neared the lift-door and saw himself going into the small inhospitable room, alone with his weary thoughts, he felt the need of a whisky taken in company. Not necessarily someone to talk with, but at least people talking around him.

The passage over the rich carpets soothed him. Although he always complained to both Miss Pickering and Jean when he had to go to York, he enjoyed the feeling of movement into a new dimension of dignified living, of respect and therefore of power. Usually, to economise, he stayed at one of the smaller hotels, but this time he had felt lazy and had booked in at the Station Hotel itself, where the Executive met. And he was glad that he had. It would have depressed him in his present mood to have returned to a place with a dim hall and stairs of worn carpeting, nobody but a scornful cat or a sleepily suspicious porter to watch him going up to his lugubrious room, with its cracked basin, its dusty curtains with dead flies on the window-sill, its picture of the Zulu War or the Baptism in the Jordan.

The cocktail bar was quiet, only some half a dozen people were chatting there. He got on to a high stool at one end, and tapped to catch the attention of the barman who was engaged at the farther end in close conversation with a favoured client. He tapped again and still nothing happened. He didn't like to tap too loudly, he didn't want to make himself conspicuous with some *faux pas*. Four more customers came in, and the barmaid in pink, with arms bared to the shoulder and hair done up in an elaborate crown, went to serve them. I shouldn't have got anchored right down here at the end, he told himself, trying to find excuses for the girl's ignoring of his taps. The nearest drinkers moved closer, to make room for the new-comers, and Emery thought that he knew the young fellow with the fine fair hair, a six-footer in tweeds and a public-school accent. Yes, he did. He had met him about six months ago. The six-footer had come to him at Newcastle with various queries; he was writing an article on the Tyne for *Reynolds News*. What was his name? The man with the R.A.F. moustache said, 'You've got something there, Philip.' So Philip was the name, Philip what?

Philip Something turned and looked at Emery. He too stared with a dim recognition. 'Hallo, so you're here?'

'Yes.' He felt he must say something. 'Got a bit of a headache.' The barmaid came near and bent for something under the counter. 'Whisky,' he said sharply.

'I don't know where you got that idea,' she said to someone the other side of the R.A.F. moustache.

Philip Something was saying good-bye. 'Right-o, Hector. See you at half-past ten.' He turned back to Emery, who was making a furious

effort to catch the barmaid. The barman was still deep in his confidential discussion at the farther end; but she came back near Emery, to get a bottle down. He tried to lean over and touch her on the shoulder, but she was just a fraction of an inch too far away. He flushed, feeling foolish, and made an effort to reach yet farther; but the next moment she was away again. He relapsed back on to his stool, swearing that he'd never come into the place again. Philip Something was watching with a smile.

'I'll brain that woman in a moment,' Emery growled.

'I doubt if she's got any brains. You might try some more vulnerable organ.' Philip put out his hand, and said, 'Hey there, what about a whisky?'

'Whisky?' answered the girl at once, and put a small glass under the up-ended bottle, manipulating the mechanism.

'A double,' growled Emery, not sure whether it was chance or public-school accent that had made Philip succeed where he had failed. However, the girl gave him a smile as she put the glass down. Perhaps the growl for a double had done it. Anyway, he felt better and hoped Philip had seen the smile.

'Were you down for the T.U.C. at Brighton?' asked Philip. 'I went there to interview some of the boys.' He scarcely waited for Emery's shake of the head to run on with what was clearly a witticism he had made several times already. 'I suppose there's some good argument for having the T.U.C. or the Labour Party Conference at a place like Brighton or Margate. Lots of accommodation or something like that. But it does seem a sort of satire on the movement, eh?' Emery gave no sign of agreement or disagreement, and Philip continued, 'You know, those middle-piddle-class places, they're more suited for labour aristos and class-collaborationists than stalwart socialists, surely.'

'It's a matter of convenience, accommodation space, and so on.'

'Even if you weren't there,' said Philip earnestly, 'you must have your opinion of what happened. I'm interested in these things—personally as well as journalistically—and I'd like to hear your views. You were very kind and useful when I asked you all those questions about Jarrow and the rest of it.'

Emery replied in measured tones, frowning. 'Well, in my opinion it was a tremendous expression of working-class strength and determination. It's shown the world we're going straight ahead.'

'Will the forty-hour week be strongly pressed on the Cabinet?'

'It is being strongly pressed.'

'That was a fine speech of Shinwell's.'

'Yes,' said Emery after a pause.

'You agreed with him?' Emery nodded, and Philip cited the gist of

Shinwell's remarks. 'Now the struggle really begins, and the class-enemy will spare no effort to wreck the Labour Movement. Now we must watch out for the attack, whatever forms it may take; for the threat to vested interests will increase.' Emery nodded again.

'Naturally that's correct.'

'It made me feel fine,' said Philip. 'You've gathered that I'm a reasonably fervent socialist?'

Emery nodded again. He didn't want to commit himself too far: he felt that this Philip was a callow sort of simpleton, though he was daunted to some extent by his accent, the elements of sophistication mixed up with his political naiveties. But the impasse of the conversation was broken by the advent of a wiry-haired man with thin eager nose and horn-rimmed spectacles, who banged Philip on the back.

'Hallo, Jim,' said Philip, looking a little guilty at being caught in an enthusiastic political conversation.

Jim waved at the barmaid. 'Gin and it, my dear Belinda.'

'That's not my name,' said the girl, at once detaching herself from the two men with whom she'd been chatting.

'What were you talking about, Phil?' Jim asked. 'Sounded to me like politics.'

'This is Jim Aspern,' said Philip, shuffling, 'another Fleet-street tripehound—but the true breed this time. Myself—'

'Forgive me, Phil,' said Jim, 'but you're more like an affable Irish terrier getting under the horse's hooves and following all sorts of trails, but never the fox's.' He took his gin. 'Thanks, Belinda. What was your theme, Phil?'

'I was talking about Shinwell's speech,' said Philip reluctantly. 'And the general impression made by the T.U.C.'

'Good,' said Jim, and looked at Emery. 'I won't ask you what you thought of the ballyhoo. You'd feel honour-bound to say it's been a great show of working-class strength.'

Now it was Emery's turn to look discomfited. 'Well, it was.'

'Did you hear Saillant's speech?' Philip asked Jim.

Jim rattled off. 'Frat greetings, W.F.T.U., unity of working class, Soviet Union pillar of world socialism. Cheers. More cheers. Move to next business. Meanwhile Bevin backs Churchill in Red Army scare in Commons.'

'You're a cynic, Jim,' said Philip in a mixture of scorn and envy.

'A journalist has to grow a tough outer skin or he'll be flaring with erysipelas and all the other affections induced by rubbing against our loathly world. It's not cynicism, it's a protection against skin diseases.' He nodded at Emery. 'But you still haven't introduced me, Phil.'

'We met at Newcastle,' stammered Philip, 'Er, Mr. . . .'

'Emery, Will Emery, A.E.U., Tyneside,' Emery interposed. 'Don't mind me. I find it interesting to hear your opinions on an event that naturally concerns me. Especially as your opinions differ considerably.'

Jim Aspern was clearly pleased to have the opportunity of airing his views on any subject under the sun. 'The T.U.C.? The usual tug-of-war of interests, power-politics like everything else. Idealists providing cover for power-stalkers. The rank-and-file delegates mostly full of good intentions in a blinkered sort of way, and the officials mostly concerned how to combine the frustration of the aforesaid good intentions with the strengthening of their personal positions.'

'You go too far,' said Philip. 'I know the right-wing leaders want to sell out, but you mustn't forget the rank-and-file—the pressure from below will determine policy in the long run. The organised working-class aren't such fools, and their will-to-socialism can't just be side-tracked.'

'Will-to-socialism, my fanny!' said Jim energetically. 'Will to be fooled, you mean. Attlee will no more introduce a single real socialist measure than I will—and I make this comment with profound admiration for his mediocre Machiavellian mentality.'

'What about the reception given to the wire of the Liverpool dockers appealing for no more cargoes to be loaded on to Franco's ships?'

'The cargoes continue to be loaded, you sap.'

Emery listened intently. The points which the two journalists were crudely raising had been agitating his mind for the last few weeks, and he couldn't yet quite make up his mind as to the strength of the opposed forces within the Movement. All the impulses and attitudes developed during his struggle as a shop-steward cried out that the rank-and-file demand for a definite movement into socialism must be supported—that it would conquer, whatever tactics of evasion were used by the Cabinet and Transport House. But against that conviction there spoke his experience as a Union official, experience which had steadily turned a simple desire to help his fellow-workers into an entangled struggle for self-preservation. Struggle to keep his foothold in a situation incomparably more ragged, shifting, and precipitous than he had imagined it as a steward. Struggle to hold his own between the demands from the men he served and the employers with whom he argued, knowing that a single false step would bring him down and that he could expect no mercy. And though the struggle was at times dizzying and frightening, it had its compensations. Each time he won through, he was left with an elated sense of his capacity to master the difficult techniques of success in the rôle he had undertaken. Each time he won through, he felt himself driven more in upon himself. And

so his experience as an official led him to agree with Aspern about the complicated fight for position going on behind the public business of the Congress. But that didn't mean, he told himself, that you could reduce the whole thing to the crude conflict that Aspern postulated.

'Look at the E.T.U. resolution on Greece,' Philip was saying. 'That shows you how important sections of the T.U. movement are feeling.'

'What about Attlee's violent attack on them as fraternal delegate from the Labour Party?'

'They replied as strongly. They pointed out that he was trying to lay down T.U. policy in a most undemocratic way.'

'Yes, and the situation in Greece is unchanged. Who holds all the cards? Think twice, you sap. The T.U.C. accepts the W.F.T.U. report; it takes the Greek trade-unionists to its massive and noble bosom. And British trade-unionists continue to make arms and ship them for the shooting down of those acclaimed and embraced brothers. Who wins? Saillant or Bevin? The E.T.U. Executive or Attlee?'

'It won't go on for long.'

Aspern gave Emery a weary and collusive smile. 'I suppose you've heard those words before—probably ever since you were snatched untimely from your mother's milk by the ravening poodles of the class-war. I see a cosmic fatigue on your brow.'

'I more or less agree with Philip here,' said Emery.

'I wonder,' said Aspern. 'Here, Belinda, another round.'

'My name isn't Belinda,' she said, but she attended to them at once. 'What makes you think my name's Belinda?'

'I don't know. I like your pink dress and I like the name Belinda. I'll explain the rest at five o'clock tomorrow morning.'

'But I'll be in bed then.'

'So will I. What about it?'

'No, thanks.'

'You're polite, anyway. Generally I get a slap in the face, and then at a due interval the bedful of charms.'

She gave him a gentle pat on the cheek. 'There, consider yourself slapped.'

'Right, what's the number of your bedroom?'

She smiled at Emery. 'Why don't you keep him in order?'

Aspern turned to Philip and raced off a bit of information, 'Of two thousand German officials in the Anglo-American Zone, at least fourteen hundred are ex-Nazis.' He turned back to the girl. 'You can't slap my face without paying the penalty. Anon, anon.' He lifted his glass. 'On business in York, Mr Emery.'

'Oh, just a bit of routine. A small dispute referred on from the District.'

How is the balance of power tipping? he thought. He hadn't learned much from the argument, but he had a feeling that Aspern knew more than he said—that he could have argued his case with details gleaned behind the scenes. And those details were what Emery wanted to know—the clashes and rivalries of Ministers, the rôles of various Under-Secretaries, the attitude of Morrison to Cripps, and so on. It was from matters like that, he told himself, that policy was formulated; not from the speeches at T. U. Congresses. And so, though he didn't like Aspern's over-simplified and brutal formulations, their effect was to stress his own scepticism about the strength of the Left, which, at a superficial glance, had seemed to dominate some important moments of the Congress.

Aspern was talking away about a press conference where Bevin made what was announced as a basic statement of Foreign Office views on the situation in the Near East; and Aspern, who had spent some years in Egypt, Palestine, Iraq, had noted a gross blunder which made nonsense of most of the contentions. When the journalists were told they could ask questions, he tried to bring this point out; but Bevin managed to confuse the issue and work round it till all the others thought Aspern had got himself in an untenable position. 'Now that's political genius,' said Aspern, holding his glass up to the light and watching its changing glints. 'He didn't understand a word of the rigmarole he'd been doled out by the Foreign Office toughs and fannies; but he pulled the wool over a whole pack of pretty hard-boiled journalists. I desisted out of sheer admiration. Besides, I merely knew the facts. If I'd kept on, he'd have made me look twice as silly as I did already. And he still wouldn't have known whether Iraq was in Iceland or Patagonia. Yes, that's political genius for you.'

'You can have it,' said Philip, who seemed depressed, borne down by Aspern's impregnable cynicism. And suddenly, for no reason, Emery remembered his full name. Smith. Philip Smith!

III *The World of Work*

IO

Yorkshire

PENNING, A LARGE heavy-moustached man with a seal on his watch-chain, was at first cautious and not very helpful. He was suspicious of an owner's son who wanted to learn all about the running of a mill; he feared that the interest might turn into a wish to ferret out weaknesses in his department as well as in others. But when he found that Kit knew almost nothing of the industry and wouldn't recognise any weaknesses if he saw them, he unbent, twiddled his watch-seal more confidently, and made a fair effort to help Kit in getting at least a general hang of the machines and processes. And after the first difficult mornings, Kit felt increasingly at home. He felt even a certain friendliness towards the big square five-storied block of the mill, its tall round chimney and its square clock-tower. The Swinton name on the brass plate struck his eye with a faint note of family pride; the shining brown door, the brass-bound cork-carpeted stairs gave out an impression of strength and efficiency, and when he passed through the door that divided offices and works, he felt the impression intensified.

The weaving-sheds were intolerably stuffy, stinking of wool and oil. Skeps of weft cluttered up the space round the machines, and the wool particles afloat everywhere irritated his nose and throat. The machines seemed too crowded. Ventilation was inadequate, usually a couple of windows in the roof and a hole or two in the wall, which in the cold weather were closed with wooden shutters and needed ladders to be reached. The whitewashed walls were thick with fluff and blotched with oil splashes. And at first he thought the lighting too bright. Yet, after the first sense of confusion began fading away, he felt that the weaving-sheds, too, were as much under his father's control as the quiet office section, and that they had their own system of efficiency.

'He's no fool,' Penning confided to his wife as she sat knitting before their home-fire, in the rumbling reminiscent mood that came on him about half an hour before bedtime, 'but it's not the same as in the old days. You can't get right inside a mill at his age, after you've been fooling round with this and that for so long. It's the impressionable years that count,' he said solemnly, and ended with nodding head, 'Think on.'

Penning was both Personnel and Welfare Officer. Mr Swinton had

a strong dislike of the modern expert, who learned efficiency as an abstract principle and thought he could come in anywhere and apply his methods. He had even more disliked, during the war, the U.S.A. business-colonels and salesman-majors, who wanted to speed up British production with systems that overlaid industry with top-heavy efficiency controls. He detested bright young men with up-to-date ideas about the handling of personnel and welfare projects. However, he had given in to what he rated as a fad—to minimise criticism or suggestions from the Ministries of Supply and Labour—to the extent of appointing Penning, a solid foreman-type with no nonsense about him, Personnel and Welfare Officer. Penning understood without any special instructions that his task was to obstruct all nonsense, all pampering, all new-fangled schemes devised to make jobs for experts who knew nothing.

'The world's not like what it used to be,' said Mrs Penning non-committally. 'It's better and it's worse.' She wore round glasses and looked like a benevolently stupid owl.

'Think how his father started in the works at the age of fifteen, no nonsense about him,' said Penning, unintentionally paying Mr Swinton the compliment that Mr Swinton paid him. 'And he knew most things about the mill long before that; it wasn't a month before he knew every string and screw of the looms—arguing with old Mr Swinton about moving the machines and going to night-school three nights a week. But that was all in the old place and the old days. Well I remember how he came to me as I was weighing the pieces and entering the weights on the tickets and in the book. That's a slow way, he says with his head on one side, and it's worse when you stitch the numbers on with that old sewing-machine. It's too slow, he says, think on.'

'That was in the days when they didn't forget chapel, too,' observed Mrs Penning, crossing her ankles—the time when she could cross her legs was as far off as the chapel-going that she lamented. 'Some folk forget where they come from. Not that you can say the same about Mr Dacres, he's still a trustee and grateful to the Lord.'

Penning shook his head and murmured mournfully, 'Aye, think on.' And his wife, seeing it was time for bed, put her knitting aside in her work-bag, and stood up. 'Well, we must lie down so that we may rise again.' Penning gave his seal a last toss and stood up, too.

★

Kit had been told to do nothing in particular for a few weeks and familiarise himself roughly with the running of all the departments. As he felt foolish and lost without something to concentrate on, Penning

gave him various small tasks or messages which would not demean him too obviously in the workers' eyes, and suggested that he should try to master the wage scales. An easy matter, thought Kit in intellectual pride. Then he studied the placard giving the scale for winding on the shed-wall, and couldn't make head or tail of it. And found that most of the winders couldn't, either. How did they check their rates?

'Well, it's like this,' said an old winder. 'We see what we get paid for a job of work—say ten pounds weight wound—and we calculate from that what we ought to get another time.'

Weaving and warping scales varied throughout the industry. Men doing the same work in different districts got different pay. It was all extremely confusing.

Penning paused to jiggle his watch-seal and give some aid. 'It's like this, if I may put it in a nutshell. The weaving rates vary according to the number of picks per inch, warp-beams, shuttles, and heald-shafts. Also according to the width of the piece, the fineness of the sley, and such-like matters that you can work out for yourself.'

Gradually Kit learned what the terms meant—that a pick was a thread of weft, that a warp could be arranged on one or more beams, that two to six shuttles could be used, that heald-shafts could range from four to thirty-six, and that each shaft could carry up to several hundred healds of worsted or wire with an eyelet-hole for threading the warp-ends. Healding was a skilled job: the warp-ends could be variously drafted. And then from the healds the ends passed through the sley in groups of two, four, six, or eight.

He chatted with some of the weavers at the 8.30 break, and they tried to explain things. 'There's an extra payment of a ha'penny a shaft for all heald shafts over sixteen.'

'You see,' said the old winder, 'that means you get the same rates for sixteen as for eight, though there's lots more threads.'

'A ha'penny per pick extra is paid for weaving a name on the selv-edge,' said a girl, who had just joined them. She had dark hair bundled up under a cap, and a straight nose. There was a glow in her clear-cut face that made him look at her twice, despite his effort to grasp the heald-shaft calculations. She saw the bewildered look on his face and thought he wanted further explanations. 'You see, it means a harness or jacquard arrangement on the loom. And that makes more trouble for the weaver, though it doesn't increase the wearing quality of the cloth.'

'No, of course,' he said, quite confused.

After that he lost the thread of the argument—something about extra being paid for single cuts, one piece length of eighteen or twenty-

four strings. Not much, only sixpence up to thirty picks, ninepence up to sixty, and a bob over that. But it doesn't make up for the extra time taken in starting a warp. That's right. And if the warp is fancy and has more than one colour, there's a bit extra, but when there's a dozen extra colours, you still get only that small sum to cover all the extra care needed for the weaving. That's right.

The girl, whom someone had called Jill, seemed to lose interest; she went off. And then he, too, lost interest.

All the same, maddening as the problem of scales and rates was, he found that he was beginning to understand how weaving and warping were carried on, to appreciate the craft-skill of the workers. And he felt that he was getting on quite well with the workers themselves.

The department where he was most at home was the Designer's Office with its chart of the standard Swinton makes on the wall and the fine weighing-scales in the glass-case, the twist-tester on top of the case and the whole atmosphere of precise and complex draughtsmanship. When he told his father of his interest, he was given a sort of quizzical approbation. 'More than ever in my young days the designs are important. If you get the knack of them, you'll pull your weight in the firm.'

Kit tried not to show his pleasure. Back in the department he found Rouse, the head, screwing up his eyes and lips as he pored over his black-covered board and its pile of coloured skeins, and couldn't help entering a little more boisterously than usual. Rouse glanced up with sharp interest, then returned to his board. He answered any questions with extreme thoroughness, but volunteered no information. But with Sid Wotton, one of the assistants, Kit was already on more familiar terms. On his second day in the office, going to fetch a handkerchief from his overcoat, he knocked out of Wotton's coat a copy of *The New Statesman*, and that lunch hour they had a chat on the confused state of the world. Wotton, who called himself a libertarian socialist, was frowned on by Rouse, who once interrupted a few words on politics during work hours with the dry comment, 'No politics here, please, gentlemen. You're paid to use your brains, not your tongues. It won't help if you put the world to rights and can't stop selvedges from curling.'

Rouse was a jealous defender of the virtues of woollens, and never lost a chance to denigrate nylon, linen, cotton or rayons. 'Tensile strength . . .' he told Kit with gloomy patience one lunch hour. 'You follow me? Minimum, one gram per denier. Nylon and specially treated acetate rayon, it's true, can have a tensile strength up to five or seven grams per denier. But,' he added triumphantly, 'a strong fibre is

useless if it's brittle. For pliability and strength you can't beat wool. . . . Cotton fibre breaks before stretching five per cent. Wool will go up to ten.'

'But viscose and acetate rayons stretch up to twenty, and some forms of nylon and vinyon can go up to a hundred,' said Wotton maliciously, passing his hand over his wavy hair. He was a fellow with a dark smudge of a moustache, horn-rimmed spectacles, and a briar pipe at which he liked to suck without lighting it.

Rouse blew his nose challengingly. 'It's not natural. You lose softness or something else. Only nature can be relied on for the perfect balance. Natural fibres are practically insoluble in all organic solvents, and that includes water, young man. What's the use of your synthetics when they dissolve or swell or turn brittle? And don't forget the dyeing problem. Even the protein rayons, though they'll take a larger range of colours, aren't fast. No, they're not fast.' He glanced at the clock. 'Time for work again.' He didn't want that strong last word to be spoiled by some quibbling objection.

Wotton lived in Kit's direction, though not so far out, and they took to cycling home together, stopping for a glass of beer at *The Woodcock*, where their ways parted. Wotton had a good knowledge of the woollens trade in general as well as of designing, and he could relate the problems of the trade to the world situation. Kit confided in return something of his own difficulties. How was one to remain a mill-owner and yet work for a new sort of society?

'Of course it can't be done indefinitely,' said Wotton, sucking at his pipe. 'But if you had sole control, you could work out some interesting transitional forms.'

He had a quick, nervous capacity for building up elaborate schemes on any given basis; and now he launched into all sorts of suggestions for turning Swintons into a profit-sharing organisation and for giving the workers an active share in running the works.

'The joke is, you'd probably do so well that you'd find yourself beating the old hard-bitten profiteers at their own game.'

They drank to that.

As Kit grew more and more interested in the mill and its workings, he looked round for some improvement to suggest. One day, turning over the pages of back numbers of *The Wool Record* (which Rouse kept with other trade journals on a shelf), he came on an advertisement of wheeled tables for shifting weft and warp about. Next day, looking in one of the sheds, he noticed men man-handling heavy warps and beams, and recalled the advertisement. He hurried up to the designing department and looked through *The Wool Records*, sure that the ad-

vertisement had been in last year's issues; and almost gave up when he couldn't find it. But then, glancing back carelessly over past years, he came on it without any trouble.

He went down and had a chat with one of the foremen, who agreed with him. 'Aye, it takes many men away from their jobs, weftmen and weavers, winders and warpers. There's a few hand-trucks—the sort that railway porters use. But mostly the men man-handle even the bales of wool and the packed bales of cloth.' He scratched his nose. 'It's not for me to say if the saving of time would make up for the expense of doing things different. Not that things are near as bad as when I started. Every weaver had to stop his loom and carry away the pieces he'd woven, take off the old gear and bring in the new warp for the tuners to gear in. Now we have men for those jobs.'

'I still think there's considerable room for improvement, Turner.'

'There's always that, sir.'

Then, as Kit was moving away, Turner came after him and said there was another matter might interest him. Most of the weft was stored at the basement level and ought to be fetched up in the lift, but there was a notice in the lift saying that no Unauthorised Person might use it. The only authorised persons were the boys working in the spinning-mule gates on the top floor. So, unless a weaver was going back to the shed with weft when the mule piecener was using the lift, they had to lug their heavy baskets up the stairs.

Kit went to look, and found two weavers with weft-baskets waiting in the basement for one of the top-floor boys to use the lift. He questioned them, thanked Turner, and hurried back to the office, where he drafted a memorandum on the problems of moving weft, warp, etc., inside the mill, and made some suggestions about wheeled tables, trucks, and the like. And at the last moment added a project of light overhead electric cranes to lift and carry away the woven pieces—having cautiously introduced the problem to Rouse and been told that some of the newest firms used such cranes. Then he took the report along and handed it to his father's secretary, Miss Smellie.

Two days later the memorandum came back to him, with comments in red ink.

The designing office is not normally expected to re-design the whole mill. Most of the ideas here are impracticable. For one thing there is not space between the machines in most of the sheds for such things as cranes—not even for free manoeuvring of the proposed wheeled-tables, etc.

The matter of the lift, however, is being looked into. J.H.S.

Kit's first reaction was to feel disappointed and hurt. At least his

father might have recorded some appreciation of his zeal; and the easy sweeping aside of his suggestions did not convince him that with modifications they couldn't be applied. 'I won't give him another chance to jump on me in such a sneering way, he thought.

Wotton, to whom he expounded some of his ideas (without mentioning his father's reception of them), generally approved. 'The more you go into the way our mills are run, the more you find survivals from the remote past. Many of the methods go back to the days when the handloom-weaver's family used to prepare the weft and warp, and then the man carried the woven piece on his back to the fuller and on again to the contractor.' He thought for a while. 'In my opinion the management would turn down your suggestions out of sheer inertia and complacency.' (He said management rather than 'your father' out of consideration for Kit.) 'What we need is a Joint Production Committee, where the workers can force the management to realise their shortcomings. Generally it takes the man on the job to realise what's wrong with the way things are organised—especially the technical details.'

'Isn't there such a committee?' asked Kit vaguely. 'I had an idea that they were set up in most factories and mills during the war.'

'Not quite,' said Wotton with a smile. He hesitated. 'Do you really want the facts?'

'Of course I do.'

'Your father refused to accept the committee unless shop-stewards were barred from membership. That was hardly an acceptance of the principle of free election.'

'I know he dislikes shop-stewards,' said Kit, flushing.

'Dislikes is scarcely the word, I think.'

Kit changed the subject. Even though Wotton knew all about his political disagreement with his father, he felt somehow guilty before him when things like this came up. As if he had once more laboriously to define his opposition to his father's ideas and methods. And when that was done, he still felt obscurely implicated, condemned.

All the same, he was pleased and surprised when on Thursday his father looked into the office and nodded to Rouse. 'Good day, Mr Rouse, do you mind if I take that son of mine off your hands for a few hours? Something I want to show him.' And carried him off in the car without further explanation. Kit felt on his dignity. At home, in their encounters (limited almost wholly to the dining-room), they made no reference to matters of the mill; but here, side by side in the car, Kit could not get out of his mind the rebuff over his memorandum, and was determined not to make the first advance.

Swinton spoke first. 'I was extremely pleased to get those suggestions of yours, Kit.'

'Your comments didn't sound like it.'

'Are you sure?' Then, as Kit didn't reply, he went on, 'When you know me better, you'll be able to tell when I'm pleased or displeased, with more accuracy.'

'It wasn't personal, what I felt,' Kit protested. 'I was annoyed because you brushed my suggestions aside in a very superficial way. Oh, I'm well aware that I know practically nothing yet about the mill. I see only one little bit, etcetera. All the same, I feel sure that if sufficient thought were given to the matter, my ideas could be readapted, and a lot of time and trouble would be saved. It's the small bothersome things that create inefficiency and weariness.' He pulled himself up short. If he didn't take care, he'd give his father a chance to jeer at the tyro lecturing the expert.

Swinton waited a while, then he replied, 'I agree. Your suggestions will be duly considered—but as part of a much larger perspective.'

Kit was in part mollified, though he wanted to ask why his father couldn't have said all that in his grudging annotations to the memorandum. However, his attention was taken up by the scene opening before them. Coming down the Otley Road, they had Bradford spread before them—all of a piece, stuck in mass in its hollow, a jumble of dirty black and grey-black buildings, with steam and smoke rising and mingling in the grey heavens. At least a hundred and fifty tall chimneys. As high as the Tower o' Babel with a brick or two on it. Where was he being taken by his father?

'I'm going on Change,' said Swinton in reply to his thought. 'You can have a look in, too, if you like. But first we'll have lunch at *The Midland*.'

Two other woolmen joined them at the lunch table, and gave Kit a keen glance when introduced. They both knew that he'd gone into his father's mill, and obviously wanted to size him up. But soon they were carried away on the tide of trade-talk and forgot him, and Kit listened with half-interest, half-scorn, to the shorthand phrases about super-shoddy and broken tops, Irish black-faced locks and grey hard waste. Trade-talk interspersed with gossip. Kit had the feeling that despite all their hard-voiced heartiness, their assumption of being in-the-know (to the detriment of everyone else), they were carefully considering every word, parting with it as cautiously and sparingly as a shilling, guarding something all the while. They gave nothing away that wasn't public property. Voices lowered: 'Ah, there won't be much left out of that little lot. Bank's got first debentures. But you can't say he deserved better'n what he got.' Voices rising in banter,

self-praise mixed with a show of bluntness: the story ending, 'You're none of the warst mak of folk, as rough as you are'—the voices stressing the Yorkshire length of vowels. Then chuckling: 'Aye, she's the one they made the saying about: a football that'll bounce like a young widow at a club-dinner.'

Swinton didn't let himself go like the others. Perhaps he was always more restrained; perhaps he was holding himself in on account of Kit, at whom he now and then darted a swift look. Kit tried to appear as guardedly blank as possible.

Then they went on to the Wool Exchange, past the effigy of Bishop Blaize, between the pink marble pillars. Swinton whispered to an attendant and passed him something. They strolled on into the exchange-hall. 'High Close,' said Swinton. The floor was crowded with men who at a first look seemed like multiplications of the men with whom the Swintons had lunched. Knots of men in bowlers and trilbies earnestly talking, breaking up, re-forming, with Cobden looking down in grey glory over the chaffering scene. Merchants with long flat sample-rolls under their arms went round, hawk-eyed under heavy eyebrows; opening up their round packets of wool samples and examining the fibres against the background of the bright-blue inside-paper.

'Right?'

'It'll do.'

Kit stood watching aimlessly, repelled by the mixture of entangled confusion and relentless trade-energy. Somehow it was the kind of thing that seemed a caricature of itself if it was depicted by socialist opponents exactly as it was, you'd say, No, that's going too far, it isn't so stupid and infantile and mean. So brutally mean—that was the only phrase that expressed it. But no doubt, once you got inside it, once your livelihood and success depended on mastering its methods, it seemed quite different, dramatic and dignified, a world centre of trade and industry.

At last Swinton came over to him and they went out. Sure enough, Swinton remarked, 'There was hundreds of thousands of pounds changing hands in there.'

'I didn't see you doing any business.'

'Then you didn't look closely.'

Neither of them felt that the visit had been a success.

At *The Woodcock* that evening Kit took up the theme of the Joint Production Committee again with Wotton, and learned there was unrest among the women operatives. 'It links up in a way with this matter of out-of-date methods and wasted time you've been chasing

You know the weaver has to go to the office for a weaving price to put on his specimen strip, and again to get a ticket for the finished piece. Well, when the warp's done, what remains of the weft has to be cleared away, then the loom is cleaned ready for another warp.'

'Yes, I've noted all that.'

'Well, that means the loom stops at the start and finish of a warp, and piece rates are supposed to be worked out to cover that. But when a man goes to a warp that's already started and leaves the finishing-off to a woman, he hands over to her all the unpaid jobs.'

'And that's general?'

'Yes. With low-picked warps—and there may be between ten and eighty or more picks to the inch—the woman may start a warp off during the day, leave it to a man from six to nine in the evening, and come back to find she has only half a yard to weave next morning. So she finishes it off and starts another one—and then another man takes the middle out of her warp that night.'

'You seem to know a lot about it,' said Kit, watching a darts game as he spoke. 'But I shouldn't have thought all these problems of working the warp were concerns of the designing department.'

'Oh, I know several of the chaps—Sam Mellon, for instance. He's secretary of the local Labour branch. And there's a sort of discussion group—not just Swinton employees, but Sam and myself and some of the others belong to it.'

'And this Sam of yours thinks the women are treated unfairly?'

'Yes, he does.' Wotton hesitated a moment. 'But naturally some of the women hold that opinion even more strongly. There's Jill, for instance—but you don't know her, I suppose.'

'No, who is she?'

'Oh, just a weaver, but she's a nice girl, and very intelligent. Or so I think.'

'I'd like to come along to this group of yours sometime. I could join, I presume—or are employers and their sons disqualified?'

'Of course you can join. Come along next Wednesday.'

'But all that unfair treatment of the women,' said Kit, 'it's hardly a matter of exploitation by the management. It's the men workers exploiting the women workers. The last thing I'd do is defend my father right or wrong. He's a hard man, I agree, and I believe that his way of life is doomed, but there's more than crude selfishness in him. It'd break his heart if anything happened to the mill. He feels it's a sort of sacred trust handed down from the days of good old great-grandfather Matthew, who started off with two broad handlooms, a hand bobbin winding-wheel, and a healding frame in a cottage bedroom. He's still

got the winding-wheel in his room at home—I wouldn't be surprised if he said his prayers to it.'

'It's true what you said,' agreed Wotton, 'about the men exploiting the women. But you must remember that it's to the advantage of the management to keep the workers sectionally divided against themselves.'

'Give the devil his due. You're not arguing that my father or my grandfather thought that one up!'

'Of course not, it's the way things have happened in a society that lives by breeding division.'

For the first time they felt an unpleasant strain. Each wanted to break it down, but was afraid of blundering and making things worse.

'Have another,' said Kit. But Wotton said that he mustn't keep the family waiting, and they went out.

On the last stretch of the ride home, Kit asked himself where he'd stand if there was any violent dispute between management and workers at the mill—if things came to a strike. What was the use of saying he wanted a better world in general, but deprecated sectional strife for limited and probably self-frustrating objectives, when the workers of the mill demanded on which side of the fence he stood? Neither his father nor the workers would appreciate a plea that he had to decide on certain fundamental things before he could answer their questions. And in feeling himself ranged against two uncompromising forces, he felt a sudden understanding and appreciation of various recent remarks made by Cripps and Morrison, which he had dismissed at the time as hypocritical.

He sat silent through dinner. His mother had a long pointless story about five pounds of sugar delivered instead of flour: what was she to do about the points? Though of course Mr Hendle may have meant to let her have the sugar without coupons, a sort of pre-Christmas token of respect. But then, why wasn't it on the bill? Though of course it may have been illegal to write it down, in case one of those dreadful inspectors looked through his books. Still, coupons haven't numbers, so how could they trace what he'd done with the sugar. And perhaps he expects me to go and pay him in cash; but then how ashamed I'd be if he had meant it as a present. Perhaps I ought just to take the sugar back. But it comes in so handy, you'd think he'd been able to read my mind.

Swinton grunted and carried on with his own thoughts. Joyce had come to the table, dressed in one of her soberer evening frocks, the one of burgundy-coloured velvet without shoulder-straps, which Margaret found so interesting that she couldn't take her eyes away.

Tonight Joyce was on her best behaviour; she was going to a respectable party, given by the Riccards and therefore mentionable before her parents—the Riccards were much bigger mill-owners than the Swintons, and she was making the most of it. 'Why don't you come, Kit?' she asked playfully. 'You know Mary Riccards would simply love to see you.'

'I don't know anything of the sort,' he replied, not displeased. 'I haven't seen her since we used to play tennis at Guest's place.'

'She dotes on you.'

Joyce was very well made up, or else she'd been living quietly for the last week. Kit was tempted for a moment, but then decided against being swept up in any of her goings-on, even when they had the respectability of the Riccards as their show-ticket. He caught Margaret's absorbed eye, winked at her, and said, 'I might have gone along, but I promised Meg to take her to the pictures, didn't I, Meg?'

She flushed and stared. Then, as he winked a second time, she said in a self-contained but faint voice, 'Yes.'

Joyce gave a loud laugh that made Swinton look hard at her; she controlled whatever comment she had been going to make and crumbled up some bread. Mrs Swinton protested weakly, 'You didn't mention it, Margaret. Are you sure you've done all your homework? You know you went out on Saturday night to Judy's place. . . .' But Margaret quelled her with a stern glance. 'Oh dear, when is that apple-pie and custard coming?' She rang for the maid, Aggie.

After the meal, Margaret came up to Kit in the hall. He was staring disconsolately at the painting of a small girl playing with a kitten, and wondering what he'd do for the evening. 'Did you really mean it?' she asked in a hissing whisper.

Looking at her young and so-serious face, lighted with a sort of grave charm in her mingled anxiety and hope, he decided to carry out his joke, which had been meant only to annoy Joyce. 'Of course.'

She gave him one more questioning look and then said, 'Just wait a meeny-muny-mo.' She dashed up the thickly carpeted stairs, combining agile speed with silent progress as the result of long practice. Kit went and had a look out from the front doorstep. Yes, rain was drizzling down through the gloom. Not a nice night for an outing; but if he went back on his word to Margaret, what would he do? He'd yawned through the previous night with the B.B.C.; on Saturday night he'd played billiards with Brian, a game that bored him, anyhow; and on Friday he'd been with Colin to a concert of Schubert and Wolff songs. Then, suddenly, Margaret was at his side. 'Quick,' she whispered, taking his hand, 'or mother will say I mustn't wear this dress.' She was wearing a pale blue-grey skirt, finely pleated, which swung as she

walked, and a blouse of white *broderie anglaise* with round-cut neck; and she was knotting a heather-coloured scarf under her chin. 'That's my raincoat over there.' He helped her into the coat, admitting to himself that she looked surprisingly pretty. 'Mother gave me the blouse,' she whispered, 'and I've never yet worn it. She's always stopped me. Come on.'

They hurried round to the garage, and he took out the small grey car. He had intended to go by bus, but somehow he felt that it wouldn't be fair to Margaret's adventurous spirit.

'Any preferences?' he asked as he drove down the drive between the rhododendron bushes.

'No, I haven't been to the pictures once this week,' she replied, with a little gasp, as if astonished at her own abstinence. They were silent for a while, and then, as they reached the main road, with the reflections of the street lamps glowing in dull splashes on the wet blocks, she began telling him all about herself. About an awful teacher named Miss Wrangsbury, whom everyone called Dogsboddy, who had great fangs in her face and wore stockings of cable-stitch that she knitted herself, and who positively lived on vegetable-laxative pills. This Vile Dogsboddy had a special down on Margaret, having found in her desk a caricature of herself ('absolutely exactly like her'), chewing up pills with her great fangs. But June Copley, who had the most marvellous wrist-watch ('only about the size of sixpence, with her name inside'), said the most terrific things to the Vile Dogsboddy, she wasn't afraid of anything or anybody, she sent Vile Dogsboddy a live hornet in a matchbox by post, and she would have been expelled if her mother hadn't been a bosom-friend of the head mistress. And the next worst person to Vile Dogsboddy was Vic Powicke, who was a filthy cheat and madly jealous, she wrote notes by putting a dot under letters in her geography book, or whatever it was, and if you didn't know you'd never notice them, but if you read the dots in order, you could make out the message. What sort of things did she write? Oh, just silly things. Too silly to say aloud.

She laughed a small, merry laugh and went on with her tale in a rapid whisper, as if even in a sports car there were parental ghosts and dictaphones laid by Vile Dogsboddy; and, anyway, such confidential matters lost their virtue if recounted in a normal tone of voice. Kit had the feeling that he was being paid some sort of profound compliment by the confidences. 'You do have an exciting life,' he said at last in a pause.

Margaret was annoyed. 'It's dreadfully dull, we're all going out of our wits with dullness. Someday we won't be able to bear it any longer and we'll put a stink-bomb in Dogsboddy's bedroom.' She paused to find the one and only right word. 'It's fiendishly dull.'

They went to the largest cinema and he paid for the most expensive seats, feeling that such seats, like the car, were the least tribute he could pay to Margaret's obvious conviction of a great event. He bought her a large ice-cream when the lights went up and regretted that chocolates were rationed. In a remote but emphatic way he was enjoying her enjoyment, and drowsed through the films, which came up to his worst expectations. The main feature was all about a man who loved horses so much that his fiancée jealously quarrelled with him and did her pathetic bit to make him realise women could be as attractive as any four-footed beast. But not till she saved his favourite stallion from an injection on the eve of the Great Race did he discover that Women and Horses can go together in a full life—while she in turn understood that Horses were just too marvellous and agreed to share his Love with them. After that came a farce about somebody pretending to be somebody who was pretending to be somebody else, until a baby brought them all together, pretending to be themselves.

He emerged yawning into the chilly street, with the crowd pouring by from the gilded foyer. He was about to say, 'Well, that's that, now let's accept defeat and go home,' when he saw how strangely excited and thrilled she looked. And surely she had lipstick and powder on? She certainly hadn't when they left home; she must have hurriedly made up when she slipped into the Ladies as he got the tickets and waited among the huge photos of pink-and-cream Stars. His boredom assumed a pleasant tinge of sophisticated superiority, and he remarked, 'Let's go and have a coffee at some hotel.'

She pressed his arm, and he knew that he had said the right thing. They moved through the dim drizzle to the car-park and he drove to the nearest hotel, which he felt would impress her. She settled down in a chair in the lounge, doing her best to look as if she came there every night; and now, watching her, he too was thoroughly enjoying himself. She read over the leaflet that an attendant had given her at the cinema about coming attractions, and took in the scene of the lounge without staring round. At the next table three large-sized business-men were drinking brandies and making throaty noises through cigar smoke.

'Are you sure you won't have something to drink?' he asked, half in joke, half in response to her demure air of maturity.

She smiled. 'Whatever you have.'

'Take care. I might say I'm going to have a whisky.' He leaned towards her. 'How about a sherry?'

'Could I?' she whispered, momentarily renouncing her grown-up part.

'It won't do you any harm.'

She gave a little pout. 'I'm not frightened. June had a bottle of Madeira at the start of term. I drank a whole cupful, and so did she, and nothing happened at all, except that she thought something crawled down her back. But that could have happened without the Madeira. She's like that.'

Kit called a waiter. Why not? It'd give Margaret something to talk about for the rest of term, and all the other girls would wish they had such wonderful brothers. He sympathised with her youthful rebellion, her absurd and ignorant hunger for life; after all, in a somewhat more complicated way, he was living through the same sort of thing. So, watching her, he felt as young, as ridiculously young, and yet immeasurably older, sadder, wiser. He was patronising her, and yet all the while he felt far more lost in a world which did not impress him and which he failed to impress. Then the drinks came. He added a little water to his whisky and lifted the glass. 'To the Freedom of the Swintons!' She dimpled charmingly and sipped her sherry very carefully.

A noisy group had come out of the dining-room and taken over the table behind Kit. They were interesting Margaret, and he watched the changing lights of her face. When she looked straight at him, there was a little flash in her eyes, and he wondered if this was spontaneous or a calculated imitation of some film-star. A sudden sensation of Joyce's presence made him turn and catch the eye of one of the group, an ashen blonde, who was about to ask someone for a light, holding out her cigarette in a dim dazed sort of way. He looked away with an uncomfortable sense that he knew her, but wasn't quite sure. The next moment he felt a hand on his shoulder and looked up to find the blonde. He stood up.

'You don't remember me.'

'Of course I do.'

He remembered now that he'd met her once with Joyce, in Leeds, but he hadn't any idea what her name was. 'Won't you and your friend come and join us?' she asked. 'Joyce will be coming along about eleven, and we'll all go back to my flat.'

'I'm sorry,' he stammered. 'I—we—I'm afraid we can't.'

'Well, at least give me a light,' she said. 'Everyone's talking at the same time in my party.' He managed to get his lighter going at the second attempt. She gave a puff. 'Some other time then, my dear. It's such a small world, we'll meet again.' She nodded at him and then at Margaret, and went back to her own table.

Kit sat down again and leaned over. 'I couldn't remember what her name is, or I'd have introduced you.'

Margaret, who had been sitting very much on her dignity, relented

at this apology; she had been afraid that Kit was ashamed of her or thought her too young to mix with his friends. 'Of course she's perfectly dreadful, but I think she could be *terribly* fascinating in a sort of way.' She sipped her sherry gravely.

Kit tried not to smile. Was it the films or some trashy novel that had provided those phoney phrases? 'Don't be so broad-minded. She's just a mess, and that's all there is to her.'

'She's a friend of Joyce's,' said Margaret, forgetting her adventure into romantic vice and tightening her lip in virginal disapproval.

'So she says. Drink up and we'll go.'

'You wouldn't rather go with them?' she asked magnanimously. 'I'll understand if you do. She seemed to like you most awfully.'

'Come along,' he said, and they went without a backward look.

In the car, during the drive home, he felt her stealthily removing the lipstick and other cosmetics with a pocket handkerchief. He pretended not to notice; but when he had brought the car up to the garage door, he gave her a gentle push. 'Out you go and slip upstairs. I'll put the car away.' He cut the lights out.

She half-slid out, then slid back and threw her arms round his neck, kissing him. 'Oh, thank you, Kit, it's been gorgeous. I'll never forget, never, never, how good you've been.' And then slipped away, leaving him smiling in the dark.

He met Jill Wethers at the works on Wednesday. He and Wotton were going for a short brisk walk in the lunch-hour, and near the gates they met her. Kit recognised her as the dark-haired girl who had taken part in his discussions about warping and weaving scales. Wotton, however, was the one she nodded to. 'Coming along tonight?' he asked.

'Yes, my aunt's decided to postpone her attack of rheumatics.'

'This is Kit Swinton,' he said.

'Pleased to meet you.' She gave him her hand, and somehow her firm cool grasp disconcerted him. With the handkerchief off her head, she seemed more formidably handsome; her hair sprang up and back from her brow in waves and curls, as if a strong wind was blowing it back, as if it was a mane.

'We've met before,' he murmured.

But she was talking to Wotton. 'It's Equal Rights, isn't it? Equal Pay? Well, I ought to have something to say on that.' She smiled. 'The problem will be to stop me talking.'

'I hope you don't mind me coming?' asked Kit, not quite sure what he meant, but vaguely meaning to infer that he, who represented the management, would come humbly to hear her views.

'Why should I?' she answered a trifle coldly, and went off.

'She's a shop-steward,' said Wotton, with a proprietary note of pride in his voice that annoyed Kit. 'Ask your father. He's always on the look-out for a chance to sack her.'

'Why? Is she always causing trouble?'

'She'd probably say that the conditions cause the trouble and she merely tries to set them right. Which is true, of course, to a certain extent.'

'Such as?'

'Lavatory basins were the last thing. She got six more put in. The time before that it was ventilation.'

'I gather that you approve of her.'

'I like her. And I suppose I envy her. I always envy people with that sort of single-minded energy. I want the same sort of things as she does, but I can't help feeling the clue is inside people. She's one of those who think organisation can do anything—grow wheat at the North Pole and make new sorts of human beings.'

'I don't envy people like that,' said Kit, with a conviction that he was diving deep into the secrets of his soul. 'I rather resent them, but they make me feel I want to struggle with them.'

'And if they defeated you, you'd take over their single-mindedness?'

'No, I'd just feel enslaved to it.'

'And if you defeated them?'

'Then I'd become single-minded.'

Perhaps the conversation was just a rhetorical game, perhaps it was probing the depths. In any event, they both enjoyed it, and felt remarkably alive, modern, free. A pity they had to turn back at the foot of the hill.

Kit had been wavering about the discussion group, he felt that he'd had enough of such things at the University. Also, he'd never been very good at mustering his ideas in a debating way, and it infuriated him to find himself outshone and outwitted by people whom he despised or considered his inferiors. Set debates, arranged arguments on general themes, and so on were at their best amateurish, false, putting a premium on the flashy and the demagogic. And it doesn't make them any better, he thought, by dropping the Victorian term, Debating Society, and suggesting that they're matey and democratic as Discussion Groups.

But after the meeting with Jill he decided to go. The effect of strength she gave—was it bodily or spiritual strength, or both?—attracted him, but at the same time made her seem alien, dangerous, strange. He recalled various stories by D. H. Lawrence, and tried to fit her into

Lawrentian categories of strange, dark life-forces, but every time she burst through the properties with which he thus sought to endow her, vigorously actual. He had only to remember the cool, firm grip of her hand and the Lawrentian elements disintegrated as a phoney mysticism.

'Valerie Fletcher said she met you the other night,' observed Joyce, whom he encountered coming out of the bathroom with her head swaddled, red-faced, and exuding heat; she always took very hot baths—baths that'd boil the flesh off anyone else's bones, despite her mother's pleas that it was debilitating and somehow almost wicked. For the last couple of days she had been keeping to her bedroom, complaining of migraine. 'Who was the wench you had? Valerie said she was a painted-up little thing you must have picked up in the cheap seats of the cinema.'

Kit was about to reply indignantly, but the contrast between Valerie's vicious vision of Margaret and Margaret's naively exalted self suddenly tickled him. 'Wouldn't you like to know?'

'I only like hypocrites being shown up,' she retorted.

'Very moral of you,' he said, and slapped her across the behind with the evening paper he was carrying and left her.

After dinner, for which he changed into one of his best suits, he went straight off to Morley's Coffee House, where the meetings were held—a ramshackle old building in a courtyard, warren'd with rooms for club meetings, domino games, classes. He took the sports car, though he knew that Joyce had intended to use it. The curses that Joyce would give on finding it taken were part of the joke he felt he was playing on the world, the sense of elated and secret superiority that had gone on singing inside him ever since his encounter with her in the passage.

Arriving early, he found no one in the room which the notice-board assigned to the debaters, and he sat on the stairs outside for a quarter of an hour, using as a seat the evening paper with which he had slapped Joyce. Then a lad whom he didn't know turned up, and went in search of the key. A girl, not Jill, arrived at the foot of the stairs, peered up at him, and said, 'Hallo.' When he replied, she came up, and, leaning on the rail, lighted a cigarette. Using its glow to get a glimpse of his face, she said, 'Don't know you, do I?'

'I'm a friend of Sid Wotton's. He asked me along. I don't think he mentioned when things started.'

'Eric ought to have been here ten minutes ago, but he's got toothache. Generally something goes wrong, if you ask me. Have a fag.' He took one of her Woodbines to be sociable, and suggested that she should sit down. 'Oh, I'm sick of sitting down,' she replied. 'Typing and re-typing all day. I'm in a patents agency, and every word has to

be typed perfectly. One mistake and the whole thing must be done all over again. I can tell you it's maddening at the end of a foolscap page of Numbers, Dates, Marks and Classes, Goods and Renewal Dates, to get one number wrong. No rubbings out allowed, you see.' He sympathised, and she asked, 'What do you do?'

'Textile design.'

'Now that's the kind of job I'd like. I only have to give one look at a pattern and I can cut it out. But I don't suppose that's quite the same thing, is it? Still, it's something. Let me know if there's ever a vacancy, and I'll have a shot at it.'

The lad returned with the key, opened the door, and switched the light on. 'Hallo, Rose,' he said to the girl, 'where did you spring from?'

'I'm too tired to do any springing. I just came on my feet. Brr, put the gas-fire on.'

In the light she showed up as a large amiable-faced girl with a big mouth and hair in a knotted snood, wearing a belt dotted with regimental and corps badges. She smiled at Kit and looked him frankly over, and he lost the assurance he had felt in the semi-dark. But now in a few moments a dozen more had come, and Wotton was racing up the stairs five at a time, apologising for being late. But still no Jill. After some desultory gossip and backchat, which Kit could not join and which left him at a disadvantage, an elderly man with a walrus moustache took the chairman's place and tapped with a pencil.

'Sit down if you don't mind—and come to the front, come to the front. Why you're all so bashful, I can't tell. I've yet to see the night when you don't have to be called forward. I know all your faces too well to be put out by having 'em close under my eyes. That's right.' He cleared his throat. 'The subject of the brawl tonight is nothing new—no subject worth a fight is—and just because it's as old as Adam's rib, it's a subject that brings out the best and the worst of us all. So get to it and shame the devil.'

His words were greeted with a murmur of amusement, not because they had any wit but because he enjoyed them so thoroughly himself and was obviously a much-liked and familiar character. The first speaker was a small angular girl, Mary Something, who began confusedly, but soon warmed up sarcastically to her theme.

'The chairman's a great one for knowing what happened in the Garden of Eden—everyone laughed—'but though he's full of Adam and Eve, I've never heard him tell of the other one, who's more to the point of our argument. Pinch Me. Adam and Eve and Pinch Me. Pinch Adam and Pinch Eve, that's who he is, the chap that's pinched 'em both, pinched 'em with cold and hunger alike, and got away with the fat of the land. That's how I see it when I think of my own father

and mother; for if I hadn't had a grannie, I'd have had nobody but Pinch Me for my companion. Aye, the only way they could hold hearth and home together was by him working nights and her working days. They only met when there was a strike on or at the week-ends. And so when I hear the weeping crocodiles talk of the sanctity of family-life and the need of different scales to keep the mother at home, I think of my own early years'

She went on with a sketch of the part played by women in war production, and read out some of the tributes paid by leading politicians as well as the records of skilled work by women in engineering trades. Then she cited the main statements made since the war by Trade Unions and Trades Councils demanding equal pay for equal work, and ended with some bitter comments on Cripps and Morrison.

Half-way through the speech, Jill had slipped in; and as Kit was in the back row, she sat next to him. When there was a pause, he turned to her, but she was leaning over the chair in front, whispering to Rose. Then Wotton made the opposing speech, agreeing with all the basic points of the first speaker, but arguing that the government couldn't do everything at once and that production must be considerably advanced before Equal Pay became practicable.

Nobody, in fact, was ready to oppose the principle of Equal Pay, even for debating purposes—except one sturdy fellow with a pipe, who kept on insisting every now and then that women's place was the home. And so the argument gathered round the question of tactics. How much socialism could the government be expected to bring in at once? Was it a good thing to draw women into industry before we had extensive nurseries and crèches?

A woolcomber with a wry-smiling face made a mock-serious speech advocating combing for women as a weight-reducing job. In a half-year they'd rattle when they walked. He opened his coat to show his own leanness. 'It makes more space in the house, too. Landlord can pack us ten times as thick, and that helps profits.' He wandered into folk fantasies about the excessive thinness of combers, forgetting all about equal pay. 'Aye, you never see a comber crush a cricket. Old combers never die, they simply creak away. There was one at Badley, he stamped on a cricket and killed his own grand-dad; and there was the one at Halifax who died and went to a right pleasant place, and thought he was in heaven, sure enough, seeing it was so much cooler than what he was used to. Only he'd made a sad mistake, and he was in hell, you see. I did hear once a parson say that that text in the good book about chaps thrown into a burning furnace and yet not dying was translated all wrong. In the Hebrew it says they were all put to work in a Bradford combing-mill. Ah, and sometimes it's dirty work, too.

My dad told me how he had to handle hair with the scalp still stuck to it during the Boxer War. . . . But, as I was saying, since it's fashionable to be skinny, let the women take up combing; and, besides, it'll make 'em so nettled and jumping-mad they won't abide being put down and cheated with unequal pay.'

Kit found that he enjoyed the speeches, which were either hard-hammering on the point at issue or meandering away according to the particular obsession of the speaker. Suddenly he was startled by Jill rising at his side, and for the first time he felt personally involved: afraid that she would turn out stupid or shallowly embittered, afraid that her remarks would work out as an attack on the Swintons, forcing him to reply and spoiling his detached pleasure.

'Those of the Swinton mill I see here,' she began, 'know more or less what I'm going to say.' And she described the system by which women did the unpaid labour at the beginning and ending of a warp. 'What's more, if the warp's a long one, she might have work to do next morning and yet find there wasn't any weft left—though there'd been a good lot of it when she knocked off the night before. And worse still, the men don't do any cleaning. I can tell you a weaving warp makes a hell of a fluff and dirt. So a man on overtime makes extra work for the woman when cleaning day comes round.' She spoke quickly and vehemently, but clearly, clenching her right fist and now and then giving it a little shake. 'The inequalities in industry aren't just a matter of lesser pay for the woman doing the same job as the man. They go deeper than that. They're bitten right into the mentality of both the men and women on the job.'

'That means we've got to educate people—both sexes—before we can get the social basis that will give Equal Pay any meaning,' said Wotton.

'It means no such thing. Equal Pay is the basic issue. You'll never get rid of the old mentality while you have unequal pay to justify it.'

A woman who hadn't so far spoken stood up. 'When I was in munitions during the war, the girls hated a charge-hand who treated 'em like rational beings. What they liked was the ones who patted 'em and said they were poor little dears and women hadn't got mechanical minds, so it was no use explaining the why and the wherefore, just let 'em do it the way they were told and stop trying to use the brains they hadn't got.' She sat down with a bump, truculently.

'That only underlines my point,' said Jill.

'More pay would have only meant more cosmetics,' replied the woman.

'You can't settle this matter in a week,' cried Jill.

'Aw, woman's place is in the home,' said the man with a pipe.

'What's going to happen to the race if it gets this mentality of yours, or whatever you call it?'

But at this point a ginger-haired chap in a muffler said he agreed with Jill that Equal Pay for Equal Work was a fundamental point for a socialist government, and not something to be considered tactically. 'Once we ask if we can afford it, the answer must be no, for it means we're not taking a socialist view. It means we're accepting the old financial bogies, the old formulas that can't solve the problem except by splitting the workers and driving wages and conditions down. What we've got to ask is this: Have we got a socialist drive, a drive to build up on resources in a socialist way, or have we got dependence on the monopolists? Everything depends on the answer to that.'

'Absolutely,' said Jill, with a hard, clear smile on her face.

Ginger went on, 'We're importing a couple of hundred million pounds worth of goods yearly from the U.S.A., and exporting less than a sixth as much back. How is the deficit made up?'

'Income tax,' said the man with the pipe. 'Beer.'

'It's made up by loans from the U.S.A. Well, how long do you think that's going to go on without this country falling into total subservience to the States?'

'What's the alternative, Dan, to taking money from the States?' demanded Wotton.

'A socialist plan or at least a policy of resistance to the monopolies, a policy of trade with the new countries that are crying out for the goods we can supply. Poland, the Soviet Union, China . . . there's no end to the markets we can find as soon as we break from dependence on the U.S.A.—and while the U.S.A. market, such as it is, merely stimulates our luxury trades, the other market would give new life to our basic industries, engineering, shipbuilding, textiles.'

The man with the pipe interrupted to say that Dan had omitted a third alternative, the one that the government ought to follow—in fact, the one it was following. Hadn't Herbert Morrison said in New York: 'We are great friends of the jolly old Empire and mean to stick to it'? Hadn't he said that his government needn't be unduly concerned if people sought to attach to it 'obsolete labels such as Imperialism or Capitalism'?

That started off an uproar, almost everyone trying to butt in—Jill saying, 'Notice where Morrison said that—to reassure American big-business,' and Dan growing incoherent with rage at the suggestion that Capitalism was an obsolete term, and Wotton saying everything must be studied in its proper context. The chairman banged with his fist till order was restored, and then, after ten minutes more wrangling on the relations of Britain and the U.S.A., he took out his big silver

watch, blew through his moustache, and said, 'Well, Mary, what about the coffee? I won't try to sum-up. Majority for Equal Pay; no agreement on the American Loan—have I interpreted the feeling of the meeting aright? . . . Good. Next Wednesday we're having a Social. Bring your own sugar. Jill, don't forget about the gramophone records. Now, free for all.' He stood up, stretching himself. 'And when you've got all this equality business on the statute-books, I hope you'll see to it that it applies to religion as well as politics and wages. I'll believe there's sexual equality when I hear on alternate days: Our Mother which art in Heaven.'

'Sandy's one of the last grand old Victorian atheists,' said Wotton to Kit. 'He can never leave out an irreligious finale.'

Kit turned to Jill, but she had gone off to help Rose and Mary bring up the biscuits and coffee. 'I like him,' he said.

Wotton wanted to explain, to separate out his real opinions from those he had set out for the sake of a debating opposition, but Kit couldn't see any difference. Wotton was afraid of what he called Centralism; and so, though he supported Equal Pay for Equal Work on principle, he wanted it to come about by local decisions, not by a governmental order which would be linked, he said, with herding people into mass-production. 'The communists aren't *left* enough for me, he declared—a phrase which Kit had heard him repeat many times and which clearly gave him great satisfaction. But what wasn't so clear was why and how it enabled him to defend the government's policy.

However, Kit wasn't interested in the ways by which Wotton reconciled his libertarian ethics with Crippsian economics. He was hoping to have a chat with Jill; and he only began to listen carefully to Wotton when the latter said, 'Of course it's easy for communists like Dan and Jill. They have a logical standpoint, and they can throw bricks in all directions from it. What I complain about is the way they think that standpoint is commensurate with the universe. It's the old method. Set up a logical system and declare it covers everything, then black-guard as unreal all that it doesn't cover. Only in this case the term unreal has its place taken by the term reactionary.'

I should have guessed it, thought Kit, with something of a shock. He looked round again for Jill, but it was Rose who handed him a cup of coffee and sat at his side. Their early meeting on the stairs had given her a conviction that he wanted to hear all about her insufferable manager with his fears of high blood-pressure and her fellow-typist Maisie, who had her fortune told every week and wasn't disillusioned at getting a different fortune each time. She laid her hand on his knee to emphasise a point, and he wondered if it was an assertion of the

New Woman with her equalities or of the Ancient Eve with her overtures. Jill was talking fast and furious with the chairman Sandy and the man with the pipe, whose name was Abel—till at last Mary said it was time to lock up, and they went downstairs.

'I've brought the car. Like a ride?' Kit asked Wotton.

'I've my bike, but you might take Jill. She lives a good way out, and it's a cold night for bussing. I'll go and get her.'

Wotton fetched her away from her argument with the unruffled Abel. At first she demurred that Kit would be taken out of his way, but after a little pressing she gave in. 'I'm glad to get home quickly,' she confessed as they started off. 'I live with my aunt, and she's a bit poorly tonight. Not bad or I wouldn't have left her, but I'd prefer not to be late.'

He felt something of an advantage and merely said, 'It'll only mean a few minutes longer.'

After a while she asked, 'How did you like it tonight?'

He turned a corner. 'I belonged to the Socialist Club at the University'—he hadn't actually belonged to it, but he felt that a slight exaggeration was justified—'but I must say I found tonight more interesting, even though some of the talk was a bit off the subject. It had more of an air of reality about it. . . .'

He was acutely aware of the dark world into which they drove, cleaving it apart with the lights. She seemed to warm to his companionable mood. 'What does your father say to your opinions?' she asked in tones in which he felt curiosity and friendliness mingled.

'Of course he doesn't like them. But I've made it clear I've a right to go my own way, and he's given in—to that extent. He's overbearing at times, as any self-made man is liable to be. I suppose it's fair to call him self-made. The mill's three times what it was in grandfather's day.' He had a feeling of showing a remarkable objectivity in talking thus about his father. 'But he's got a sense of justice all the same. You probably think that's nonsense, but you don't know him as I do.'

She quenched his self-confidence by remarking, 'I know him a darn sight better in some ways, I should think.'

'I don't see how you work that out.'

'It's simply a matter of social relationships. Anyone working under your father knows him in a way that you can't know him.'

'I question that strongly.' He tried to be both firm and friendly. 'I've felt dependent on him, and I've fought against him.'

'It all depends,' she said carefully, 'how you've fought, and why, and where it leads you. In his time Swinton has fought other mill-owners, but that doesn't make him a proletarian.'

'I can't tell you in a few words. If you're interested—and I hope you

are—I'd like to thrash all that out. I think we're closer than you imagine.'

'It could be,' she said, as if she wasn't taking him very seriously and didn't want to argue.

He was more aware than ever of her body at his side, her brown dress of knitted material, her clean profile glimpsed a moment as he leaned for the brakes. One small ringlet falling over her brow, the others blown back. Small muscles of tension at the corners of her mouth. A slight scar one side of her chin. As for herself, he could see her only in absolute terms. Annually chaste, violently impregnable; or annually promiscuous. Cut off by a class barrier—not the class barrier, for instance, that lay between him and the stenographer Rose, but a division of consciousness.

This was something that went far beyond the enigmatic element which his adolescence had found in all girls, the fact that they seemed to be simultaneously heavenly virgins and creatures of blind lust. Or rather it was that element given a new point of concentration. This girl incarnated, he felt, the class to which he had been painfully and inconclusively turning. To enter into her mind, into her body, would surely be to complete the removal of loyalties from his father's world, to find securely the new bases for which he had been confusedly questing.

And yet he was vaguely aware that there were two twists possible to his desire for a valid point of contact with this girl. He could go with her in a common struggle, and learn her thoughts by learning his own in that battle-line, what she would call the ranks of the revolutionary proletariat. Or he could remain aside, wholly or in part, going his lonely way, and snatch her secret by predatorily gaining her body, by mastering her as a woman. Which aim he was setting himself he didn't know or care at this moment.

At last he managed to speak. 'You don't seem very convinced.'

'Are you?'

'Yes . . . I think I am. . . . At least I hope you don't mind my saying I'd like to know you better.' She made no response and he had to go on. 'I've made a sort of revolt against the way things are—a rather stupid and blinkered sort of revolt, I suppose you'd think. Inevitably I begin with my father and then move to the system he represents, and personal elements carry over from the first to the second phase.'

'Nothing wrong with that,' she said, as if unwilling to comment, 'as long as you're aware of it and keep on fighting to get things clear.'

'In a way it seems as if I myself have had nothing to do with it. I've tried to compromise, but there's something that keeps forcing me on. We can call it History, but I don't see that the name explains much,

What makes people grow? I suppose it's because they become afraid . . . they feel that there's no safety left in the old set-up. But if that's so, why doesn't everyone feel the same? No; don't reply yet. What I really want to say is that if anyone revolts against the whole set-up of things, he feels pretty lonely. I suppose that's why so many of the novels and poems nowadays have that note of loneliness and horror. But I'm not one of the poets satisfied with striking a gesture in a no-man's-land and relying on the admiration of the ghosts. I'm sociably-given, and I know that I'll either find another lot of people I can mix in with or drift back to my father's shadow.'

'That sounds sensible enough,' she said slowly. 'But where do I come in?'

'You're one of those who can provide the alternative to the ghosts and the shadow. Wotton, too——'

'Wotton,' she said with sudden scorn or doubt. He waited and reluctantly she went on, 'I'm not running Sid Wotton down, he's got many good qualities, but if you think you're getting a new class basis by chatting with him in a saloon bar, you might as well give up at once.'

'Isn't it all or nothing with you?' he asked tartly.

She was silent, then replied, 'Yes, that was pretty smug and sectarian; Sid's all right. He might help you a lot.'

'As much as a navvy in the public bar?'

She laughed. 'I deserved that. Well, you've caught me out, don't crow too loudly.'

'All the same, when you admit you went a bit too far, I feel behind your admission an even more cocksure belief that you are essentially right and nobody else is.'

She said slowly, 'You'll say I've got no sense of humour if I reply seriously—but I can't help it. I may be full of mistaken ideas—so may large sections of the working class, large sections of the party. None of us may be individually anywhere near a hundred per cent. right. But still the party is the only way out of the mess, and the working-class is still the only revolutionary force. The party can lead only in so far as it is a living part of the working-class, the vanguard section.'

'That sounds like mysticism to me.'

'But it isn't. Why we can't help being right in the long run is simply because the experience of the working-class is flowing in all the time—analysed, tested, re-applied, re-analysed.'

'I'm sorry to interrupt, but I think we're near your place.'

'Yes, we are. You can drop me anywhere now.'

'I'll run you to the end of the street. When can I see you again?'

'That depends on you, doesn't it? If our ways are converging, as you said, we're sure to meet one place or another.'

'Don't you ever enjoy yourself?'

'Yes, nearly all the time.'

'I meant, outside politics?'

'I'm not sure there is anything outside politics. But I do go cycling week-ends when I can—if that's what you mean.'

'More or less. Can I come, too?'

'I'm sure the others wouldn't mind. There's generally about seven or eight of us.'

He didn't like to admit that he hadn't been thinking of so large a group. 'Here we are.' He wondered if she would despise him for not trying to kiss her, or whether she'd respect him, or whether she just wouldn't think about it at all. But before he had time to consider the matter further, she had slipped out with a few quiet words of thanks. He watched her fade into the darkness before he started again.

There weren't any cycling week-ends. The weather was too bad or Jill had meetings. But Kit managed to see her several times, and much of the strangeness he had felt began to fade away. She, too, seemed attracted and told him a lot about herself. She'd been teaching in an elementary school in 1940; but the school was bombed out and there wasn't room for all the teachers in the new quarters in the West Country. She found a job in a small war factory making precision instruments. That, too, was bombed out and burned down, and she went into a factory making uniforms in the North. 'I've got to like the North and its people. No, I don't want to go back to teaching small kids. I'm used to factory work. It gives you a sense of elbow-room, of being in a place that matters. And I can do better political work here. . . .'

He was puzzled by a choice made on such grounds; it suggested something rigid, puritanical, self-sacrificing. How had she become political? Well, one stage melted into the next. Her father had been an old radical, a schoolmaster in the East End of London; her mother died when she was twelve; and her elder brother became a communist after the Reichstag Trial—an event which clearly meant a great deal to Jill, to judge from her voice and eyes, while to Kit it was merely a bit of Hitler's dirty work of which he had somewhere read a vaguely remembered account. Where was her brother now? He'd been on the point of going to fight in the International Brigade in Spain, when he'd had a breakdown, a touch of T.B. Still, he'd been well enough when war came to be called up in 1940. Later, he went to Burma, and had a year of fighting before he broke down with a shoulder wound and a

return of his lung weakness. Now he was working on the land in Cornwall, for health reasons. Jill hadn't seen him for over a year. Her father had been killed by a German bomb in 1942.

It was when they discussed the mill that spasms of antagonism arose. She became laconic and sharp-tongued, and her words seemed ready made, no longer her own. Only once did he bring himself to suggest that a little more spirit of goodwill and compromise might yield better results. 'Go and tell that to your father,' she said.

'While the capitalist system is carrying on at all, there's no point in trying to make things jam in ways that only cause distress to the poorer classes.' He suddenly thought he had a strong point against her. 'I understand your view-point is based on the primary premise that capitalism can't last, can't solve its own problems. All right. Let it continue till that point. Then we'll all co-operate in building socialism.' She tried to answer him back, but he went on talking 'If you feel the need to upset good relations between employer and worker, if you only trust your thesis when you can wreck capitalism from below, then where's your logic?'

'Capitalism will always solve its problems if it can go on exploiting the colonial masses—if it can keep driving down living standards at home. There's nothing automatic about history. But I've never said a word that gives you the right to talk about wrecking plans. If capitalism can keep on raising standards here and in the colonies, of course it will survive. Its defenders claim that it can do all that. Okay—we take them at their word, and press accordingly.'

'We'll argue that one out in due course,' said Kit, feeling that he was a fool to think there could be anything in common between himself and this dogmatic girl with her obstinate voice.

Rain was falling again. 'The Thames is on the overflow,' said Rouse, who liked to hand on any gloomy news item. He shook his head. 'Well, of course, sometimes it's difficult to assign blame. But when there's a certain repetition of coincidences. . . .' He glanced at Wotton and forbore to make any more direct attack on the government. 'In my opinion, for what it's worth, the shortage of fuel is going to mean a general breakdown of industry before the winter's out. Then we'll see.' He took up a pre-war trade journal and flicked its pages over as if nostalgically turning back to the good old days. 'You might look at this article, Swinton. It's about the way dye decomposition promotes the decomposition of cellulose-rayon curtains. No, you can't beat wool and the way it takes the dye.'

The clock rustled and struck its rusty chimes. 'To work, gentlemen.'

Rouse went over to the cupboard, unlocked it, and began examining the strips of cloth, cut from the centres of new ranges, which hung there from a length of string. He sighed wheezily and rubbed his chin.

Kit turned to Wotton, who was sharpening a pencil and studying range tickets. 'Is Jill up to some tricks?' he asked. 'I mean, is there discontent over something in the works?'

'There always is,' murmured Wotton.

'But what is it this time?' He paused and said indignantly, 'You can't think I'd betray anything I was told in confidence—though it's clear Jill suspects me of being capable of such behaviour.'

'If it was anything requiring confidence, I wouldn't know about it. No, I just hear from Sam Mellon and the others what's the common talk of the mill. First of all, there's a dispute over an accident. A steel rod jumped out of a loom and hit a man in the face, bruised his mouth and broke his dental plate. The man wrote a letter to Mr Swinton and got a reply back from the cashier that there was no claim in law, as the plate wasn't part of his body.'

'It sounds casuistical to me. But what's the law on the subject?'

'Nobody knows the law till they go to law about it.'

'Can't the man's Union take the matter up?'

'Don't worry, it will. That's what Jill is seeing to.'

'And what else is happening?'

'Arguments about overtime of course. And that shed out at the corner that was run up for extra work during the war. It narrows at one end. It's hard work getting the warp-beams into the farthest looms; and when the warps are damaged as they're lifted in, the weaver's fined.'

'I see,' said Kit thoughtfully. 'Nothing so terrible about all that. I'm going to have a try at making dad accept a Production Committee. Disputes like those you mention ought to be easy to settle if there was discussion and a little goodwill on both sides.'

Wotton didn't answer. Rouse, who had left the room for a few moments, came in. 'Wittleston,' he said to the least important member of his staff, 'take these hanks down to the scouring-room. They haven't been cleaned. Gross negligence. Go down to the colour-room and get them washed, and tell Mr Moore I'm surprised.'

'I'll go,' said Kit, jumping up and knocking over a roll of blue point-paper, adding belatedly, 'if you'll let me, Mr Rouse.'

Rouse was about to tell him to stay where he was, but pursed his lips. 'All right. Don't get the numbers mixed. Wittleston, you may return to your day-dreaming, but at least keep your mouth closed.'

Kit went slowly downstairs, wondering if he would have the face to go into the shed where Jill was working and pretend to have some

official reason for speaking to her. He passed the door that led to the sheds, but didn't open it. Instead he paused to chat with a bleary-eyed old sweeper, who couldn't have known him as the boss's son; he asked for a match. Kit gave him one, but the man didn't strike it. Instead he rubbed it on his sleeve and stuck it in his thick hair. 'You couldn't spare a cigarette, sir?' To his surprise he was given one, which he sniffed at and put behind his ear. 'Time I took a spell in the Gents.' He chuckled. 'You ought t'have seen Johnny Rubble with the three-prong fork. Only a moment ago he was standing where you are. 'Why've you got that fork in your hand?' I says to him. "What fork?" he says. "What's this about forks?" he says. And he looks at it in his own hand as if I'd wished it there. Just like one of those conjuring tricks at the Empire. "You're going balmy, Johnny," I says to him, and it's as true a word as I've spoke for a long time. "Do you think you're old Nick?" I says to him. You know old Nick, he's the one that put his wife out on the mat and took the cat to bed.'

'He must be a bit scatty,' said Kit.

'He was standing just where you are,' said the sweeper.

Kit went reluctantly on. He was suddenly filled with a delight in the variety and oddness of the world of men, and thought. I'll make jill realise it some day. And anyhow I want her, I've got to have her.

The household was thrown into one of its periodic fits of disorder by Mr Swinton's asthma. Mrs Swinton went round in a distraught condition, ringing up old Dr Greeves at the least complaint of the patient, who complained as soon as he saw her. In her haste to answer the telephone she slid on one of the hall carpets, but only bruised herself. Everybody seemed demoralised. Dr broke a window with a tennis ball; Margaret over-ate herself and had a bad stomach-ache; and Kit, going in to the bathroom, found Joyce snoring in the bath, which had become cold. For days after she was afflicted with a hacking cough and a conviction that she was sickening for pneumonia.

Swinton resented fiercely being put to bed and told to rest. He had never been ill till his asthma began about five years before. This Con-founded Thing, he called it. He felt it as some external object which had been maliciously conveyed into his astonished flesh, like a devil into a medieval sufferer, and he expected any decent doctor to be able to knock it out with a violent pill.

One evening Kit went down to ring Brian from the hall 'phone. On the way Margaret waylaid him and put her arms round his neck, so that she could whisper effectively into his left ear. 'Joyce has shut herself up in her wardrobe, and when I tried to open it, she swore at me. She's been drinking brandy to cure her cough.'

'I'm sure the wardrobe's the best place for her,' he replied. 'The only thing is that sooner or later she'll probably come out.'

Margaret thought this an exquisite witicism and departed giggling. Kit went over to the 'phone. He hadn't seen Brian since they went to a football match about a fortnight back, and he wanted to see how he reacted to a suitably arranged account of Jill and the works. But when he lifted the 'phone, he found himself listening-in to a conversation between his father and somebody else—Bannister, the firm's general manager. No mistaking that slight twang with its obsequious note.

'... Yes the left-hand drawer of course ... Next Wednesday we must make a public statement that the fuel is insufficient to run the works.'

'I think I know how to phrase it, Mr Swinton,' said Bannister with one of his laughs. 'What is needed is to suggest—unmistakably, but naming no names—who is to blame for the parlous situation in which—er—our unfortunate nation finds itself.'

'That's it. Make the draft, but let me see it before it goes. I expect to be up before Wednesday, but I can't get anything definite out of this incompetent doctor of mine. Keep P.N. files in your own hands, under lock and key.'

'Mr Swinton——' Bannister's pained tones conveyed infinite but respectful reproach at the mere suggestion that he might do otherwise. 'And get ready a further hand-out. The press will see the matter is pursued. I've had a word with Shonks.'

Kit hung up. He was feeling slightly sick, and he feared that he'd make a noise and give himself away. He felt as if he'd been drawn in as witness, as an accomplice, of some mean crime, and yet when he recalled the overheard words, he couldn't find anything particularly criminal about them. His father had spoken of writing a letter to the press concerning the firm's inability to carry on with present fuel supplies. Nothing had been said to infer that the truth wasn't to be told. Supplies were probably low. And as for the tone of the remarks—all parties tried to make capital out of any situation they could turn to their own advantage. The fact that Bannister had an unusually unpleasant voice did not affect the legal aspects of the conversation. No, Kit told himself, there was nothing criminal about what he had heard; and yet it had somehow shaken him to the roots.

Why? Was it the mere childish fear of being detected as an eavesdropper at parental keyholes? Was it that he had correctly intuited under the remarks a deeper train of hatred and intrigue? No matter how he mocked himself, there lingered in his mind an echo of his first horror and fear; and a strange image of his father. Mr Swinton, with swollen belly and top-hat, snarling into a telephone, drawn in

heavy caricature lines as the Ruthless Capitalist of Jill's argument, making nonsense of all Kit's pleas for mutual goodwill. In using the fuel shortage to close the works for a while, Swinton was going to kill two birds with one stone. Scare the workers and make them more submissive, and work up propaganda against the Labour Government, against coal nationalisation. Well, after all, what else could you expect? Swinton wasn't the caricature figure, but he knew every trick of the game. In a sense, half the fun of running the mill lay for him in beating the trade unions or surrendering on one point in order to come back on another. He felt the mill almost as an extension of his own body, and was outraged when others tried to take charge of its workings.

Mrs Swinton knocked timidly at the door and Kit realised he had been pacing rather loudly up and down. 'What is it?' he called aggressively with pounding heart.

She came half in. 'Would you please help me with Joyce? She's ill... I can't get her into bed.' And then as he followed her, after a moment of revolt, she went on in a whisper, 'I don't want the girls to see her. Margaret's getting inquisitive...'

Poor mother, he thought with sudden pity, and pressed her elbow. 'Don't worry.' They went into Joyce's room. The tossed bed was empty, and Joyce, in unbuttoned green pyjamas, was lying half-in half-out of the wardrobe amid fallen garments. Disregarding his mother's grateful murmurings and complaints, he found that Joyce was braced tightly against the sides of the door. He pulled her arms out and then lifted her up and carried her over to the bed. There he threw her down. She sank in, bounced up on the spring mattress, and smiled rapturously with closed eyes and open mouth.

Mrs Swinton gave up pretences. 'I'm so afraid your father will find out. What am I going to do? Oh, what am I going to do?' She wrung her hands.

'Put her into a Home or send her to Australia,' said Kit callously. He felt that any softness would break his mother down.

'What am I going to do?' she repeated. 'She loved John so much. She's never got over his death. And when he was born, she came into the nursery with a penknife to put his eyes out.'

Yes, it was true that Joyce had gone rapidly downhill since 1943, but she hadn't been exactly a saint before that. And what was the connection between trying to blind the baby, being lovingly wrapped up in the youth, and mourning the man's death with brandy and fornication?

Joyce began to moan and Mrs Swinton turned to her. Kit gave one look at the bed and went downstairs to the hallstand. Get away from

the house at all costs. As he strode down the road, he suddenly felt the place like a doomed house in an Ibsen play, a lair of regrets, monomanias, death impulses. And he went on arguing with Jill about it. You ignore the whole vast pressure of psychological forces, he told her wraith. Men are locked in strange and disastrous patterns, and they must work out their fate along the only lines that give them satisfaction. If those lines led to anguish, madness, death, yet they are chosen.

And now he felt himself one with all the others of the family. One with his stricken and passionate father, who would die a hundred deaths rather than yield one iota of his power over the mill. One with his suffering mother, who blamed herself for all the conflicts and alienations in the family. One with Joyce who lived in a paroxysm of guilt which she tried to exorcise with a defiant wallowing in 'sin'. My way is not theirs, he told himself, but it's no use trying to run away from them. I'll fight father, but in an open, friendly way. I'll give mother and Joyce my understanding tenderness, and relieve the burden that's breaking them down. I'll mediate between them all, in the same way that I'll mediate between father and his workers.

And then, as he stopped at a call-box to ring Colin, to whom his thoughts had turned, he remembered a part of his father's 'phone conversation which had been eluding his mind. The reference to some special files, to be guarded in zealous secret. Taken in the semi-conspiratorial context of the other remarks, that reference became sinister. What was going on in the office? Other plots against the government, schemes to evade taxes, black-market ventures? Or something quite outside his ken?

He was caught up in an increased uncertainty. For a moment he contemplated telling the whole story to Jill. Surely then she'd no longer doubt his sincerity, his ability to take an objective view, however many family loyalties were involved. But as soon as he tried to visualise the confession, he realised that he'd never make it. Jill wouldn't see things as he did—at least not till he had had much more effect on her than he'd yet had a chance to have.

He turned away from the call-box and made for the nearest pub. I wonder if father has hidden away some of his fuel stocks, he thought. But probably it's only the latest designs he doesn't want our competitors to get. He asked for a pint of bitter, and regarded himself in the mirror between the rum bottles.

'You look as happy as the man who dropped a pound note in picking up sixpence,' said the barmaid, who might have been handsome if she had had any chin.

'How did you know?' Kit replied. There was no one else in the

bar but an old whiskery man talking to himself over a pint of mild.

The barmaid hitched a ribbon up over her shoulder and seemed ready for a close conversation, but two customers came noisily in, arguing about football. 'I've got three certs—three home teams on the short side. Put a tanner on each and win seven bob.' Kit moved away and the man with the certs cried cheerily to the barmaid, 'Hallo, my lovely, I wish you'd sleep up that tree across the road. Then I'd give it a shake and you'd drop into my arms.'

'Get on with you,' she answered, hitching up the ribbon over her other shoulder. 'After I've done drawing pints for you thirsty fellows, I can hardly climb into my bed, let alone trees.'

'I'll be your ladder,' said the man.

Kit was ignored, unable to compete with such efficient backchat. Relieved and resentful, he finished his beer and slipped out. After all, there was always the cinema.

But when he neared the Odeon down the road, his heart failed him; and as he turned away he remembered Margaret, who had been with him when he last went to see a film. He warmed towards her, feeling how gaily she seemed outside the net of doom which he had earlier imagined as enclosing the whole family. Would she grow into a world of greater purity and freedom? Or was she merely too young yet to realise the compulsions that environed her? If she's still awake, he thought, perhaps I could tiptoe to her room and have a chat with her.

He walked briskly home. There was still a light in Margaret's little room on the south side of the house, but as he looked at it, he knew that he wouldn't go up. If he talked of trivial matters, he'd feel a fool and go away more dissatisfied than ever; and if he embroiled her in the miserable conflicts of the household, he'd be responsible for spoiling her gaiety, for making her realise the compulsions . . . No, if she was going to fall like the others, he wouldn't have it on his conscience that she fell through his doing.

II

Lancashire

IT WAS A FEW days before he had a chance to tell Pat. There was a rush of work at her office, and she was staying late; and anyhow he didn't want to hurry things. Then on Friday he went round to call for her, they'd arranged to go to a dance. And on the way he met Mr Henderson, a small wiry man from Durham who had been under-manager in

1943 and who was now full manager. Henderson was a miner who had risen from the coal-face to managerial level without losing contact with the men; and he was generally liked and trusted.

'Hallo, Baxter,' he said after a moment's scrutiny of Dick's face. 'I heard you were back.'

Dick was pleased at being recognised. 'And I was right glad to hear you're now manager, Mr Henderson.'

'Have you decided what you're going to do?'

'I'm coming back to the pit.'

'Good. That's what I wanted to hear. We'll need new technicians. If you're as smart as you used to be—he smiled to show that he needn't make any provisos—'I'll see you go on a training course as soon as possible.' His keen eyes held Dick's. 'It's a great triumph, the nationalisation, and we've got to show our mettle. I'm one of those who want the pits to produce their own technicians.'

Dick hesitated. 'I don't mind telling you, Mr Henderson, it was hearing you were the manager, and not Mr Urquhart, that made my mind up for me.'

'Let the dead past bury its dead,' said Henderson. 'Don't hold it against others that they acted according to their lights, but let's make things different now.' He held out his hand, a greyish clipped man, with clipped hair and a face that looked as if it had been clipped here and there for economy, and a clipped voice.

'Thanks,' said Dick, and went on with a lighter step.

Pat wasn't home yet. 'She won't be a moment,' said Mrs Hemans, a rather gaunt woman who exhausted herself trying to grow flowers in a garden patch six feet square, and to rear fowls in a shed about the same size. She had just finished squirting a winter-wash on the meagre piece of privet in the front, to deter the greenfly of the spring, and asked Dick earnestly if he knew anything about chickens. A little but not much, he told her, and she took him out to the back. 'They're wheezing.' She opened the shed.

They went in. 'Look, they're huddling at one end of the perch,' said Dick. 'Wait a moment.' He lit a cigarette and puffed.

'They're wheezing. Can't you hear them? And I've fed them so well. Mr Hemans will be so annoyed if they all die on me.'

He puffed out some more smoke. 'I thought so. There's a draught from those holes over there. The smoke ought to clear away without being blown about.'

'Now that's clever of you,' she said, staring at the holes, chronically inadequate. 'I wonder now. . . .'

Stimulated, he looked at the perches. 'There's red mite on your birds, too, I think.'

'Oh, what do I do for that!'

He didn't know; but she had a book on poultry rearing, so they went back into the house. She found the book on the shelf in the living-room, and he found Red Mite in the index. 'It says paint the perch sockets and every crevice with a fifty-fifty mixture of creosote and paraffin,' she read out. 'Now that's clever of you, I must say. I'd never have noticed. I'm so glad that you——' She was going to add something about him and Pat, but flushed and closed the book with a bang, afraid of putting her foot into things. She changed the subject, reverting to her normally querulous and bewildered voice. 'Mr Hemans has a mathematical mind; but of course that's for the office, and when he comes home he likes to relax. . . . He doesn't altogether approve of fowls. But I feel I ought to do something to help. The wireless said it was patriotic. I'd like to have a pig, too, but Pat thought it was an awful idea, and so did Mr Hemans.'

A scraping of keys and boots, and in he came, a burly man with a well-kept moustache. He nodded a salutation to Dick, sat down by the hearth, undid his boots, and commented on the weather. Then he complained that the change-over to nationalisation meant a lot of twiddle-twaddle in the accountancy office at the pit where he worked. Generally he considered nationalisation as a political wangle to provide jobs for useless officials at the expense of Mr Hemans. The new Regional Office, he complained, was staffed with a lot of useless ladedda golf-playing University-men.

Pat came in, apologised breathlessly for being late, and dashed upstairs. A small bathroom had been put in since Dick went overseas, and she no longer had to wash in the kitchen.

Taking an evening paper from his pocket, Hemans commented on items that caught his eye. Russians call for a Uranium Check—can't trust 'em, must be some trick if they suggest it, so leave it to Bevin. Strike Wave all over Korea, both North and South—where the devil is Korea? Somewhere near Java, isn't it? Time these Asiatics were taught a lesson, anyway. Look at Malaya and India and the rest of those swarming countries; but what with all the strikes in Britain and France, how could you expect 'em to behave better? 'I'm not a reactionary,' observed Hemans, one of his favourite remarks. 'I'm not against a strike with some reason behind it.' He smoothed his moustache back and drank from the cup of tea that his wife had mutely brought him. 'But the men strike now for no reason at all. They don't even try to get the Union's backing. They know they wouldn't get it, and so they think they know better. What we need is Discipline, Discipline.' He returned to the newspaper. Britain and the U.S.A. taking steps to save the German banks—that's right, you've got to have stability.

Bevin on Greece, justifying his policy—good man Bevin, not the sort to be stampeded by pressure from below. 'He knows what he knows, and he sticks by it, eh?'

In reading out the headlines and brief snatches of the reports, Hemans conveyed that Bevin and the others weren't doing too badly, they were following the policy laid down by Mr Hemans. When anyone, man or group, failed to follow out the Hemans policy, he intimated that he knew the reason, he wasn't taken in, he knew just who was doing the dirty work, and, mark his words, they'd be shown up within three months and the Hemans policy would be vindicated. When the radio was on, he answered back, putting the speaker or announcer right and giving the impression that he was delivering his corrections and instructions to the necessary quarters.

'Mark my words, and thunk of 'em again in three months' time, Bevin knows what he's doing. The Balkans are a Cockpit. That's what they are—a Cockpit. Some call them a Blazing Gunpowder Magazine. But I prefer to call them a Cockpit. I like the right word. And Bevin knows what I'm telling you. He's taking no chance with our Lifelines. The Balkans is a Cockpit, and Greece is our Lifeline. We might as well give India away. We might as well give Persia and Palestine and Egypt away, and all the rest of the Near East, if we give away our Lifeline. Just consider how the Greek Royal Family always marries into our own. I've heard fools say it's the result of political intrigue. Nonsense. It's Fate. If we weren't in Greece, who'd be there?'

He paused, and Dick said very quietly, 'The Greeks.'

Hemans looked at him as if he couldn't have heard aright. 'The Russians,' he said loudly. 'The Russians of course. Bevin knows it. More sugar! What's wrong with this confounded tea? I'm pleased to say that both Bevin and Attlee understand the need for Discipline. The working-class can't be trusted. Cripps has admitted they can't run a Christmas Club, let alone Industry.'

Dick wanted to suggest that there was a contradiction between these last remarks and the earlier attacks on State Bureaucracy, but he held himself in. To his relief, Pat came down, changed, fresh as a daisy, in a long green dress. She beckoned to Dick and drew him away in the midst of a long sentence of her father's.

'Let's walk a bit,' he said, outside. She said nothing, and they walked on. Then he recalled the dance. 'What about your shoes?'

'I've got my dancing pair in the bag here.' After a while she added, 'What's on your mind?' As he still made no reply, she asked, 'Was father getting on your nerves?'

'No. . . . I ought to know him by now. . . . But there's something I wanted to tell you.'

'What?' Her voice was suddenly sharp and over-pitched.

'I'm going back to the pit.'

Now it was her turn to pause. 'Is that definite?'

'Yes.'

'I knew you were worried. . . . I tried not to influence you.'

'Yes, I appreciate that.'

She paused again. 'I've been thinking. . . . I don't know. . . . I didn't expect you to say you'd go back.'

'No; you and Alice had it all mapped out.'

'I don't think I quite deserved that.'

'I'm sorry.'

They walked the length of the street before she went on, 'I'd taken for granted you'd find some different sort of job—something better-paid or at least with better chances. Not that we'd need a great deal at once. I'd go on with my job for a few years, anyway. Mr Chalcot has more or less told me that I can stay as long as I want to, married or not. You see, I'm quite good at the office work. And I must say I find it difficult to make out why anyone should want to go into a mine. Hard, dangerous, gruelling work, not very well paid and no future to it. When I say that, does it put me on the level of Alice and Joe? I know you think they're awful—though I'm not sure I know entirely why.'

'Not quite the same level,' he said bitterly. 'But we won't quarrel over the difference.'

She halted. 'Now, look here, Dick, I'm going home at once if you talk like that. I've done my best to be reasonable and patient. I hate rows and shouting and bitterness. I won't have you abusing me just because you're unhappy about something.'

'Not even if the something is you?' But he was at once ashamed, and went on, 'I'm sorry. You're right. We ought to be able to have this out in a friendly sort of way.'

She pondered. 'Yes, we must have a quiet talk. The dance is off. And I don't feel like a café. We'd never get down to what's on our minds. . . . I know. We'll go to José's. It's quite near. . . . She's a friend of mine, a dancing teacher.'

They went on, unspeaking, into the street of shops with the trams clattering through, and Pat rang a bell at a narrow door between a draper's and a chemist's. Someone came tip-tap down the stairs and opened the door; a small woman broad in build with a Japanese-looking face. 'Oh, it's you, Pat. Come in.' Then as there wasn't room to pass, she retreated upstairs, and Pat introduced Dick on the landing. They went into the front room. Dick glanced round at the divan with its many-coloured cover, the reproductions of Dégas on the wall,

the gramophone and cottage piano, the bowl of rose-petals; and felt ill at ease.

'Look here, José,' said Pat in a business-like way. 'Dick and I want to have a long argument. Can we oust you from your own premises?'

José didn't seem surprised. 'Of course. Do you want me to go out, or will it do if I stay in the kitchen? I'm only reading, and it's just as warm in there. But I could go round and see Kitty.'

'Just as you like. We just want the room for a quiet talk.'

'Will it be over in an hour? Right, I'll bring some coffee in then. Cheerio.' And she was gone.

'You never told me you knew her,' said Dick, who had stood silent by the gramophone while Pat and José talked.

'I know lots of people you don't know, and you know lots I don't. Must we waste time on things like that?'

'All right.' He sat down in the arm-chair. 'I've made up my mind. I'm going back to the pit. Do you still want to marry me?'

She stared at him a moment, and then sat on the edge of the divan. He looked away at the firescreen hand-painted with roses, till at last she said in a low, clear voice: 'Yes, you're right. It's simple. No; I don't want to marry you.' She checked him with her hand. 'If you don't mind, I'll tell you why. It isn't because you're going back to the mine—or not in the way you think. If you'd come back and taken me in your arms and told me you loved me and you were going down the pit, I might have argued, but I'd have given in. I'm sure of that. But all the while I've watched you setting me against the pit as if we were two things that can't go together, and so in the end I've come to accept your point of view. Either me or the pit. So, if it's the pit, it isn't me.'

'Yes, that lets you out easily.'

'I haven't finished yet. I was sorry for you at first. You were so unhappy, so out of it all. When I came across that first night, I hadn't any idea what was going to happen. I rather imagined we'd have a heart-to-heart talk at once, and know where we stood. But it didn't work out that way, and I wanted to help you find your feet again. I'm not very good at that sort of thing. I have to feel my back against the wall, the way I do now, before I can speak out what I'm feeling. The more I tried to bring you closer, the more I felt you pulling farther away. I've had the feeling you had a grudge against me, and anything I could do only made it worse.'

'There's a certain amount of truth in that,' said Dick, with his antagonism weakening before her effort to tell the truth, to find out the truth. 'It's something I don't understand myself. It's you, and it isn't you. . . . It's the whole thing. . . .'

'At times I thought you were making an effort, and I waited. I can't tell you how frightened I was. Frightened I'd fail you. And how keen I was, to be of some use and make you feel at home.' She made a gesture of helplessness. 'Oh, I don't know. It seems stupid when I talk about it. And I know it wasn't only in you, it was in me, too.'

'What?' he asked in a hard voice. Though one part of him was thawing into admiration, into a warm sense of the goodness in her; the other part was still frozen, jealous of something, bitter because the goodness in her would never be his.

'Surely you understand. The feeling of being unable to come closer. . . .' Her voice sank to a whisper. 'To love. . . .'

He wanted to go over, to kneel with his face in her lap, but something held him coldly apart, as if he were watching an excellently pathetic performance in a play. What she says is true, but it isn't the whole truth.

She went on. 'But nothing happened. Only your grudge got worse. Once or twice I've felt you hated me.'

'You're getting hysterical.'

'No, I'm not.' She had recovered herself, and her voice was clear again, though still low. 'Tell me what's wrong, if you know so much.'

'I don't know anything.'

'What do you blame me for?'

'It isn't you. . . .' Suddenly a fierce hatred of the unchanged world burst in him. 'If you only knew all the things I've seen . . . and look at the blasted world. It goes on the same, as if nothing had happened. I don't know what I expected . . . but not this. . . . I'll never forgive it, do you hear?' He struck his clenched fists on the wooden arm of the chair. 'I'll never forgive the bastards.'

She waited till he was calm again. 'And that means you'll never forgive me?'

'I don't know,' he replied exhausted. 'It's unfair to blame you. I know it is. But you're tangled up with it all, somehow. Every time I put out my hand towards you, I feel a sort of knock-back.'

'What ought I have done?' she asked wildly.

'Nothing.'

At last he looked her full in the face; and what he saw was fear. She leaned back and put her hand to her throat. He remembered the night in the park, and the dreamy way she'd seemed to want to miss the train from Manchester; and he was sure that she had been ready all along to let him go as far as he liked with her. Perhaps she'd felt it was the only way of testing out what lay between them, of driving herself to a decision she couldn't reach by any less drastic means. Break down all barriers, or end everything in an aftermath of revulsion. And he knew

that now was the crucial moment of their relationship. If he went over to her now, she'd give in and let him go as far as he liked; and if he went the full way, they'd break through all the present doubts and torments, they'd come together at last without questions. Perhaps she'd thought she spoke the truth when she said that if only he'd thrown himself on her love, she'd have accepted his choice of the pit. But it wasn't true. She might have tried to for a while, but she'd have chafed, she'd have planned and pressed for something different. And that was why he couldn't go over to her. Finer than Alice though she was in so many ways, she was yet somewhere the same. Despite the effort that she was now making to be truthful, he knew that as soon as they came to any sort of accord there'd be a return of something centrally false in their relationship.

And yet, outside his thoughts which held him apart from her, there was a clamouring in his blood for the embrace which she now wouldn't refuse him. Even if he was merely to take her and then tell her that all was ended. He wanted to have that revenge, but he couldn't act on it. Once he went into her arms on that divan, he'd be lost, he'd surrender, and their marriage would work out more and more on her terms. But because of his sudden harsh desire, he saw her with new eyes, he saw the element of weakness in her, which her cool manner of assurance normally veiled. The weakness which had shown itself in the park, and which had flushed drearily in her eyes at Manchester after the cinema. And with a startling clarity he realised that he wasn't the first who had touched on that weakness, he understood the element of fear which had made her want to make amends after his return, and which had glistened in her eyes a moment ago, which was still glistening there. She was afraid because she felt herself unfaithful to a man who had been fighting abroad. And though this discovery made him fiercely jealous and sharpened intolerably the bitter desire that hammered inside his ribs, though it made him feel something of hatred for her for the first time, it also made him see her in a more human light. And had the effect of making him want to try out a new start with her.

And yet he knew that any such attempt would only beget an illusion of contact, of nakedness, and in its working-out falsity would return: and the struggle which had become concentrated in the question: Back to the pit, or away from it? And so he refused to surrender, refused to accept her surrender, and called on all his powers of sarcasm, of anger, to save him.

'It's no use. You were right, Pat. You were right to say you didn't want to marry me—didn't want to go on. . . .' He saw that she'd like to repudiate her words. She sat watching him with stricken eyes, and he took a malicious pleasure in attributing the decision of rejection to

her. 'You're honest, and I admire you for it more than I can say. . . .'
He looked round. 'You've been here before?'

'Yes, of course,' she said in a weak, hollow voice.

He had to fight back the questions, the accusations, that heaved in his mind. If he went any further, he'd lose his self-control, he'd shout out his jealousy, he'd end by catching hold of her, and she'd surrender in order to hold him trapped in his impotent rebellion.

'Well, I think we'll have that coffee now,' he said with a tremendous effort, feeling crushed yet triumphant. He rose and went to knock on José's kitchen-door. Pat watched him silently, with something like anger taking the place of her fear and restoring the primary elements of her composure.

That night, as he lay in a sort of feverish lucidity, he relived through one of the episodes of Burma that promised at moments to throw a violent light of revelation on all that had been troubling him since his return to Britain, his difficulty in settling down, his refusal to find any common ground with Pat.

It began with an itching of his left calf, and as he scratched it he felt himself back in the truck, trying to stop himself from scratching. You'll only make it worse, leave it alone. The truck lurched, and the pencil stub slid across the paper, digging right in. He'd made up his mind to write that letter, despite everything. Not so much a letter as a kind of last will and testament. Not that he had any property worth willing away, but he had something he wanted to say, something final, something that justified his life and this futile end of it. There was no chance, as far as he could see, of the letter ever getting delivered—unless they got through, after all; and then there'd be no need for it. All the same, he meant to write it down. And when he'd written it, he'd put it in his AB 64, Part One, where he kept his stamps (the ones that had got hopelessly stuck to the cover) and the blurred photo of Pat in her tennis clothes; and then forget about it.

He kept obstinately thinking he could tell when a lurch was coming, but he was wrong. He slipped forward and bumped his head on an upright. The bales were wobbling, doing a shiver-and-shake as if they couldn't quite make up their minds to jump at him. The one at the back wasn't fixed properly, and sooner or later it'd have its mind made up for it. The steamy, damp heat was a rottenness in the bones. To breathe was a nuisance, and he kept putting off the moment when he'd have to take a deep breath. Something was biting between his shoulder-blades. And in his navel. He itched in a dozen places, and tried to scratch through his shirt. The paper dropped from the bale and slid down between it and the lorry's side. He bent down. A jerk; he hit his

head with a crack. Lay with head on the bale against the trembling metal and thought, and went on reaching for the bit of paper he couldn't get at. His face taut with a mask of heat. He felt a murderous impotence, hurt his hand, and heard a muffled shout. He banged his head again and lay dazed. Straightening up, realised they were at a stand-still, something funny was happening. Crawled over the bale and got to the truck-end, and stuck his head out where the flap was hatched up. Couldn't see anything for a moment.

The convoy had stopped, stopped dead, the whole thing. No explanation. Nobody to ask. He wanted to shout, but didn't. Then saw a couple of our chaps dodging over to the right. The shout died with a strangled rasp in his dry throat. Half his mind was still attached to that paper with nothing on it but *My Dear Pat*. Why hadn't he written when there was still time. Written what he wanted to write.

'Hey!' he called in a sort of croak, as if the hot, heavy air was beating the call back down his throat.

Tell Pat, what? as if this retreat, this defeat, this anxious straggling retreat through hot, blandly hostile country was only an emblem of other things, England, Pat, all his life. Saying: Get down to bedrock before it's too late. You've been living in a world that's not what it seems, you've been part of it. No time to lose, you've got to face the facts. What facts? There wasn't anything when he came to write, nothing that he hadn't written before. But still the nagging. First symptoms of some blasted fever or what?

His mind dragged, pulled away, like waking-up, like a focus-shift from hope to terror, from dream-dim to stark light. Like a body moving, defeating an obstacle. He saw things. The world just as it was. In a sort of sunset-stillness and slant. The light browsing on the scanty grass. And it seemed a long time, though it wasn't, before he heard things again.

Like something happening that scares you stiff. When you're a child, you ask in stammering whisper what, once or twice, what? Nobody answers you, and then you don't want to know. You only want it to be over, you want to hide, you want to stick closer to mother.

At the same time he felt there was some sort of practical joke going on. If so, he'd kick the guts out of Nobby. But even Nobby couldn't get a whole convoy to act the goat. The heat haze wavered and he felt bad again.

Coming up on the left. He saw them with a sideways squint. Our chaps all right. With our sort of big hats for keeping the sun off, and shorts and gym-shoes, and our sort of packs. Must be the Company out on the right flank, coming in to join the convoy as they withdrew. He had it all taped, and felt better. Only, why had the others gone? To

meet the new-comers or run off in a panic? He heaved his leg over the end of the truck and was steadying himself for the jump when the firing started.

It took him several seconds to realise they were firing at him. He pulled his leg back and considered the situation. These damned Japs and their infiltrating tactics. You never knew where they were. What about the morning we went across the river, and they opened fire from the tree-tops right at our back: how they got past our patrols nobody ever knew. Not much you can teach 'em about camouflage, though I'd put my money on the Chinese when it comes to that.

His rifle. What he wanted. He'd put it down between two bales when he began writing. But it wasn't there. His momentary resolution snapped. In the dimness he could hardly see, the glare was still in his eyes, the flap had fallen down. Then he saw the rifle. Sticking out. And pulled. The cursed thing was wedged under. What? Shaken down and under. He wrenched harder, sweat smarting in his eyes, blinded. It wouldn't come.

Harder. With savage pleasure he felt something give. But not what he wanted. The rifle's woodwork. Only the metal came away in his hands. He flung it down and crawled to the end of the truck. Without looking round, lowered himself quick, dropped to hands and knees. Not much room between the trucks. Japs firing noisily at random along the convoy, some eighty trucks strung in the narrow roadway, full of all we'd been able to get away with, ammo and Brens and food. The bales that broke his rifle were rice-bales.

Mortars now as well as light machine-guns, the small Jap ones jerked off with a lanyard. Looking round at the Japs coming up, he felt as he felt when he saw the brown leeches hang in clusters from his leg near Nolang, and coming up on all sides. Not so much fear as a helpless disgust.

But he still had no rifle. He moved on under the trucks on hands and knees, and didn't know if the Japs were spotting him. Bullets went thudding and chipping things round him, but that didn't prove anything. One passed through the tyre a few inches from his head, and the truck came lower. Then he saw a couple of rifles hanging out of the next truck.

He scrambled along and unhooked the slings. Now he could afford to let himself be uplifted with a furious rage that made him feel unkillable. How dare the dirty dogs leave him behind, and leave rifles behind, too, the best friend of man? A mortar shell lobbed near, he flung himself down, and the blow he gave the top of his head against the wheel seemed the explosion. He lay breathing hard, with pain throbbing, unwounded. No blood on his palm. He crawled, pur-

posedly this time, for the convoy's tail. The Japs seemed concentrated round the head. As usual, taking no chances. They'd come in round the top where the best cover lay. Trust these jungle-fighters never to come into the open in a frontal attack, even if it meant going ten miles round to advance a hundred yards.

Through the whining and the crashing he reached the end, didn't wait to make up his mind. He ran, doubled up, for the ragged bushes. And arrived. Safe. Lay a moment, weary, shaken, panting, with little jerks tugging at his legs. The firing still burst all round the top of the convoy. Those Japs again, taking no risks. Safe, he loosed his anger once more against his own chaps.

Where the hell? Not far ahead was a line of thistly-looking bristling plants. On his belly he wriggled over, then doubled on. A dip, and he could run faster, easier, even feeling good. Feeling angry. On and on. The sound of firing was less loud than the ticking in his ears. On and on. Slogging heavily now. Falling down, lying down. On again.

Round a patch of nondescript trees, he came on more rice-fields and the old familiar faces. With a queer grimy look. They ought to be taking cover better.

'Why'd you run off and leave me?'

The accusation, meant to be weighty and dignified, choked off into a complaint. 'Why didn't you come?' asked Harry. And then as though it explained everything, reconciled everything, he added, 'They got Gavin, the bastards.'

And then some Japs, who had worked up on the left flank, started off with machine-gun fire. The bullets pattered, kicking up twirls of dust. 'Get a move on, soldier,' said someone. They hurried down into a sort of ditch, bending a little. 'The bullock-carts that went through last night,' said the Sergeant behind him, discovering how things had happened.

'Three hundred miles yet to go,' remarked Harry, then, as if blaming someone, 'And we lost our food.'

'And the Brens.'

'I got a rifle, anyway,' said Dick. He tightened his grip and felt better. 'My own came to bits in my hand. It's a fact. Wonder whose this is. But why did you skunks run away?'

And then, as his hands tangled with the feel of the breaking rifle the unbroken rifle, he looked along the file of rapidly trudging men, and then back over his shoulder. As if only now he realised that he was with them. For ever. And the letter was lost, unfinished, gone west. Gone with the world it had meant to accuse, with Japs clambering all over it. Never to reach Pat, saying what. No, I can't say it that way. Can't write it down. It's here. Here or nowhere. Here and everywhere.

Be true to this. Love, and hopes this finds you as it leaves me. We're going to get through. Only three hundred miles. And then watch out, somebody. Gavin's gone, but his soul goes marching on. Christ!

An agony clawed him, and he sat up in bed. As if he'd just escaped a great danger. A surrender to darkness, to the lie; a betrayal of those dead. We're not there yet, but we're all together, Harry and Gavin and all.

He smiled into the darkness, still lost in the past but looking into the future, in a dream of danger, closely watched by all those eyes. Lay back and slept

★

Breaking the news to the family was the hardest bit of the whole thing. He told them at tea-time. His father tried not to show his pleasure. 'You did it the right way. No headstrong decisions, but the cold, clear light o' reason, and, above all, no dictation from women-folk.'

Mrs Baxter sighed but gave in. 'It's the will of the Lord.'

'Fiddlesticks,' cried her husband. 'It's the way he reasoned it out.'

Alice was the one who objected. 'You're a fool,' she said furiously. 'Only an utter fool would go back to the pit while he had any other chance. Joe would have helped you. He knows lots of openings.'

'I hope they open up wide enough for him to fall in,' he retorted.

'But you did say once you'd like to be a teacher,' said his mother, holding Alice back from the tirade she wanted to deliver. 'And now with all these new training centres, you'd have found it easy to get in.'

'My mind's made up,' said Dick. 'I never had any intention of taking a white-collar job. What I couldn't decide was whether to go back to the pit or try engineering. But now there's nationalisation, I hear there's going to be more what you might call pit-engineering, and so I may as well go back. After all, it's what I know, and Mike and the others work there.'

He knew it wasn't the whole truth, but it'd serve. It was more or less all he could put in words.

Alice must have gone off at once to find Pat and hear what she had to say about the pit decision. About ten that night she came back with her anger renewed. 'Look here, Dick. You don't mean to say you've been such a fool as to quarrel with Pat, too! I suppose she wouldn't put up with your nonsense.'

'You'd better go and ask her.'

'I don't need to ask. I know she's got her head screwed on the right way.'

'Go and ask her,' repeated Dick, knowing that whatever faults Pat might have, she wouldn't discuss him with Alice.

'Is there anything wrong between you two,' Mrs Baxter asked sorrowfully; and Dick felt that it wasn't fair to fend her off with the mockery that served with Alice.

'There's nothing wrong, mum. We're the best of friends.'

'What about the engagement?'

'We were never properly engaged, and we decided we couldn't make a do of it. Nobody but an idiot like Alice would want to fly off the handle because Pat and me decide our own lives for ourselves.'

'That's right, son,' said Baxter, pushing his spectacles back on his brow. 'You've used your reason, and that's what Alice doesn't like.'

'He hasn't used his reason,' protested Alice. 'He's done the opposite. He's let Pat down, and now he's trying to pretend it's her fault.'

'Pat didn't tell you that,' said Dick, 'nor anything like it.'

'There's some things I don't need to be told.'

'Alice, be quiet now,' said Mrs Baxter. 'If they've decided it's not for them to marry we must respect their decision.'

'It isn't Pat, it's him,' cried Alice.

'You don't know anything about it. Shut up,' retorted Dick.

'If I was Pat, I'd sue you,' said Alice, almost weeping with rage, and went upstairs.

Dick had a feeling that his mother wasn't altogether regretful that the marriage had fallen through. She had supported Alice's championship of Pat while she thought Dick meant to marry her, because she respected Pat and thought she'd make a good wife of a sort, but her heart hadn't been in the matter. And realising this, Dick felt better. For different reasons both his father and his mother were on his side against Alice, and though his mother feared the pit, he now felt much happier about his choice, with something solid under his feet at last.

'I can't put you straight on the face,' said Henderson the manager. 'You know there's a long queue of datal hands waiting to get on. What I propose is haulage or maintenance, and then early next year I'll send you off on a course. Nobody can object to that. A returned soldier who used to be on the face. And when you come back, we'll see what's the best we can do for you.'

'That's okay by me,' said Dick. 'You see, I don't want to get on the face just to earn a good wage quick. I've been trying to think a bit further ahead, Mr Henderson. I want to study the machines and the electrical aspects.'

They were talking in the colliery office, a drab little room with

brown cracking furniture and a black stove. The ungainly patched tin-pipe of the stove ran up through a hole in the roof which leaked in rainy weather. Racks on the peeling plaster walls held rolled-up plans tossed carelessly on top of one another, and the leaves of a calendar curled raggedly up. A belch of smoke came from the stove, and a wagon went shunting past the dust-streaked window. Dick stood up to go, but glanced at the stove. 'Will I give it a poke, sir?'

'You can have a try,' said Henderson with a dry cough of a laugh. 'I can control the colliery, but not that stove.' He looked round the spare, dingy room, which might have been a colliery office of a hundred years ago if it hadn't been for the 'phone, the bell-pushes, the pair of decrepit hand microphones on his desk. And as Dick bent down he went on, 'Last month I had a look at one of our model pits. There really are one or two of them, and I must say I felt our shabbiness when I came back.' He laughed again. 'I suppose you had enough to do with stoves like that in the army, Baxter.' Then he resumed his comments, which sounded like a conversation with himself. 'We've got to end this shabbiness, it's a sort of trade-mark of second-rateness . . . all the hurry and short-sightedness that have disgraced our pits. And we shall, Baxter, we shall. If only you youngsters carry on the vision of your fathers. . . . That'll do. I must get rid of that wretched contraption.' He stood up and shook hands with Dick.

Dick was satisfied. He trusted Henderson, and so, that night, he merely told Mike, who was on the face, that for the time being he was going on haulage.

When he knew more of the projects for mechanisation, the sort of mines that would begin to grow up after Vesting Day, he'd be ready to talk of his own intentions. Though he took his father's ideas of the nationalised mines with a good deal of salt, he had the feeling that after a while the miners would be able to shape the pits to their own will; and he meant to play a part in that shaping. He needed knowledge, and he was ready to work hard to gain it. With Henderson as manager, he had confidence that he'd be given his chance if he showed himself worthy of it.

Yes, it hadn't been just a confused resentment against the Josephs and Alices of this world, a wish for the comradeship-in-work that he'd known in the pit. Nor just a conservatism of habit. All that, but also a belief that the nationalised mines would give him the chance to develop his mechanical interests without succumbing to the petty intrigues and competitiveness of Joseph's dirty little world—or Alice's smug world. Would give him the chance of self-betterment harmoniously inside the comradeship of the pit-world, so that he wouldn't feel the blood of the war-dead crying out against him. He began to

look eagerly forward to the day when he would once more go down the pit.

And so, despite the lazy mornings of the last month, he didn't turn over when the alarm-clock went, but sat up, running his fingers through his hair, yawned and got out of bed. Outside the door he bumped into Alice in the most ferocious of early-morning bad tempers. She dropped her bag and spilt its contents. 'You clumsy, bloody fool.'

'No swearing up there,' called Mrs Baxter from below, who was always worried by ill-omens in the morning. 'It's tempting Providence.'

'It's Dick's fault,' said Alice. She elbowed him out of the way and went down to wash her face in the scullery-sink, repeating her daily moan, 'I'm going to leave the mill and find a shop-job.'

'Nobody's stopping you,' said Dick behind her.

'Why have you two got to fight morning, noon, and night?' asked Mrs Baxter, standing by the range with an overcoat over her night-dress. 'Alice, this is Dick's first day down. You might take that into consideration.'

'He never considers me,' she retorted, turning the tap on. 'Oh, why do I work in a mill?'

'Because nobody else will have you,' explained Dick. 'Didn't you know?'

'Let 'em bark and bite,' said Baxter, coming down in his socks. 'Sooner or later they'll get over it. Well, Dick my boy, how are you feeling?'

'Ask him after he's knocked himself out down that sinking pit of yours,' said Alice, 'not before he starts. Somebody's been using my soap, I bet it was Dick. How often do I have to say that the soap in the blue thing is not to be used by anyone else?'

'You left it open,' said Mrs Baxter, 'and the mice got at it. So I gave it a wash to get the teeth-marks off.'

'Why doesn't somebody buy some mousetraps or poison?' Alice demanded. Baxter grinned, but his wife looked troubled. He patted her hand and nodded.

'When they're as old as us, mother, they'll keep their breath to cool their porridge.'

And so Dick caught the work-bus with half a minute to spare, and, somebody said, 'Good Old Dick,' as he climbed in, and at the next stop Mike was picked up and sat behind him, telling him an incomprehensible tale about last night at *The Nelson Arms*, the main character being an old man who repeated, 'There's no bad beer, there's only some better than t'other—that's what Queen Victoria said. Then the

run of two miles was covered, out they pushed and hurried to the baths to change their clothes and hand over number checks for lamps. Dick had fixed everything last Friday, and didn't have to waste time chasing clerks. He walked with Mike through the thinning darkness towards the lighted pit-head, passing by rows of trams scrawled with numbers, names, and faces, into a drift of steam from the pit engines. Then into the big shed with tall girders lost in the dark sky, with pulleys groaning and whirring above out of sight and the ground trembling with the strain on the headstocks. A cluster of dirt-crust-ed electric lights on either side of the pit-mouth, a stunk of coal, oil, damp earth, and a bell tinkling. The greasy winding-rope spun, raced up, slowed, swayed; then up came the big bull-chains that held the cage. And the men crushed into its creaking, riveted space.

At last his turn came to press with some dozen others into the packed steel-cage. 'Put your lamp under your coat, lad' The banksman opened the gates. 'Right.' In they went. Water dripped on to his shoulders. 'That's enough.' The bell rang, the banksman struck off the signals, heaved back the lever, and the winding-gear let the cage go. Once again he felt the belly-qualm, the ear-roaring, and was afraid for a moment, as if this was his first descent. Down, as if back into his past, no longer afraid. The faces blurred in streaking light and shadow. Down, a sheer drop of half a mile, into a screeching hole of night. The sudden check caught him unprepared, speed slackening, noise dulled to a heavy scraping as they fell with their own weight. Speed slackening again, two big girders slid by, and then with an inrush of faint light and a sudden bump they were at the bottom.

Into the large open steel-arched place from which the galleries ran. Dick made for the pit-bottom office, with its tables and benches, its charts and cards of regulation. The electric clock jerked on silently. The man at the telephone exchange was taking down a message on a slate. Dick waited till he'd finished and then mentioned his name. The man stared blankly, and then remembered. 'Go along to the repair shop and ask for Davidson.'

About thirty yards along one of the roadways lay the repair shop, where bent or distorted steel props were straightened afresh. Steel props twisted into all sorts of odd shapes were heaped all along the roadway, testifying to the violence and wayward movements of the pressures of the earth that perpetually threatened the pit. Inside the shop stood the hydraulic press, worked by a column of water some 800 feet high, which flattened and hammered straight the twisted props. At the moment it was quiet, and no one was there but a man studying racing form on a mended prop. He shook his head at the name Davidson and returned to his newspaper.

The next cage but one brought Davidson down, a grizzled, taciturn old fellow who said he'd fixed to meet Dick at the repair shop as they were going in a north-east direction and he didn't know how familiar Dick was with the lay-out of the pit. Then, without waiting for answers, he led the way down the road. Dick had thought he remembered what it was like along the roads and galleries, but he was wrong. He had forgotten how to make his way without stumbling and jarring himself along the uneven surface broken up and cobbled by myriads of boots, overlaid with sleepers and rails, hacked for piping and trenched for wires and cables. The thick mush of dust not only made things more difficult, hiding holes and lumps of wood or iron, but also rose in spirals and clouds that choked his unused throat.

Then the going grew even more tiring and arduous. Foul water glistening blackly in gutters, piping overhead, closing-in galleries and jagged roofs, walls built up with shale and wooden props holding beams or girders every yard or so. Girders buckling under the pressure, and sharp bits of shale all about. Thick dust again. Timber-trams loaded with props and girders, drawn by an endless steel cable going slowly by, rocking precariously.

Davidson went on with long swinging stride, but Dick, out of pit-training, was unable to adapt himself at once to the ducking, crawling, bending movements that the galleries demanded. Every now and then the walls were whitewashed, but the dust had filled his eyes, ears, throat, and the only object on which he could concentrate was Davidson. At all costs he didn't want to ask him to stop and rest. Thank heaven, I'm not going on the face, he thought. His face stung with the brattice-cloth, set to stop the air from flowing the wrong way, through which he had brushed. Where the roof came down and they had to crouch, Davidson used his stick—sliding his hand down to the hollow under the knob—and thus regulating the extent to which he stooped. Dick banged his helmet again and again, and felt the sinews in his calves pulling out.

At last they were there. Davidson halted and put his lamp in a niche. Dick coughed and spat, 'I'm sweating like a bull,' he said.

'Aw, you'll do,' said Davidson with a broad grin. He took out a length of twisted tobacco and bit a piece off. And Dick realised that he had set the pace in order to make him, Dick, cry out and beg for mercy. Well, I didn't, Dick thought with pride. About five minutes later the others came up.

They had no sooner begun to work at the loading-point than they were called off for emergency work in clearing a fall near the coal-

face, a simple job that needed a lot of hard shovelling. Dick, working away with the others, felt at moments a sudden strain, at moments was part of it all as if the war-years had never happened. He saw Davidson keeping an eye on him, uncertain how far he had lost his pit sense; and he felt a burst of pride. He wanted to tell Davidson not to worry. What's he take me for? I know where I am and what I'm doing. All the same, once or twice he started at a noise he couldn't immediately place, and had to hold himself in, not to show his anxiety.

When they knocked off to eat, he felt that he'd never be able to get up again. Davidson and another man had brought only bread-and-dripping with cold tea—they held to the creed that you couldn't work well on a full stomach. But Dick was glad he had cheese and bread with some cold bacon in his flat food tin.

One of the men, Bob Hutton, said he was going back to Liverpool for a ship, he'd had enough of mining. 'Too much class-distinction in a mine,' he said, and made an attack on the rates and scales. 'Everyone ought to be on piece-work.'

'Tonnage rate,' said another of the datallers. 'Everybody's got to depend on everybody else in a mine.'

'Did you see the lightning last night?' asked Davidson, rubbing his knees. 'It's funny, but lightning always makes me thirsty, and it gives me pins and needles. If I drink water from the tap, it's worse.'

'We all know you was reared on a beer bottle,' said someone.

'I wouldn't be surprised,' said Davidson. 'Mrs Whitley, next door, always quiets her baby with a teaspoon of whisky, and she says it's her tenth, so she ought to know.'

'Did you hear the nine o'clock news last night?' said Hutton. 'Our government turned down the Russian proposal that the United Nations should disclose details of their troop dispositions abroad.'

'What of it?' said Davidson. 'You can't trust these Russians.'

'I suppose you can trust the capitalists, then?'

Davidson thought for a while, rubbing his knee-joints. 'Bugger 'em all. You can't trust anyone. Nor the bookies neither.'

One of the younger men began a football discussion, and everyone wanted to say something—except Dick, who felt withdrawn into himself. Not that he was exhausted. He was getting on better than he'd expected. But he still felt that mixture of strangeness and familiarity; he wanted to boast and draw attention to the ease with which he had come back into pit work, and at the same time he had an uneasy sense that the pit might have something up its sleeve, something likely to catch him off his guard. He kept wishing that the shift was over so that he'd have time to get his jumble of emotions sorted out; and he didn't want to overdo things—tire himself out without noticing it, and then

lag in the return to the shaft. With a mixture of relief and dread, he saw Davidson get slowly up and take his shovel.

He got up slowly, too, aware of the movements of his body, its weight. And felt a sharp but undefined determination rise up inside, a kind of dogged and wary pride, a gladness at being alive.

After the first week Dick began to feel once more, unreservedly, a part of the pit, ready enough to grumble at the work, but hardly able to realise that a gap of years had come between his first pit-work and his return to the sweaty gloom of mining. His bones ceased to ache, his muscles readjusted themselves, his pit-sense had come back without any jarring moments of bewilderment, though he kept on insisting that the machine racket was louder than in the old days. He had his first small accident. A piece of shale fell and ripped open a couple of inches of his forearm, and he went along to the pit-bottom office to have the cut dressed.

And the next day he was close to a minor smash of trucks. The lad in charge managed to get the haulage cable stopped promptly, as soon as the trouble started—sending a signal up the wires that ran along the tramway, charged with a low voltage. But even so, half a dozen trucks were broken, flung off the rails, a length of rail was torn up and twisted, and coal was scattered in all directions. Some of the flying lumps came thudding and clattering down the side gallery where Dick was at work, and his lamp was put out of action. He and the others of his gang were taken off haulage and put on clearing up the mess. There was so much widening and raising of roads going on under Mr Henderson's efforts of reorganisation, anyway, that the night-shift repairmen couldn't deal with all the work of that sort, and Davidson's gang was mainly doing maintenance and extension jobs connected with the haulage system.

In the lunch-hour next day there was a discussion on nationalisation and accidents. 'I don't see how any changes will stop some bastards from being lazy and wrong-headed,' said Davidson. 'Only last week I saw a Corporal unlogging—and was he using the safety coupling-balls? He was not. And about six yards off there was a lighted-up notice saying all haulage workers must use 'em.'

'He ought to be told off,' said a grizzled man named Flaker. 'Nobody's got the right to risk his own neck in a pit, for he's risking his comrades' necks, too.'

'Ah, but here's the point,' said Davidson, pointing at Flaker. 'Say you told him off, and he took no notice—as most likely he wouldn't. What'd you do then? Nothing. But what about when the pits are nationalised?'

'All right. What about it?'

'Would you go and report him to the management?'

'I might say something about it at the Lodge,' said Flasker cautiously; 'but I can't hear myself telling tales to any management.'

'Then don't tell me nationalisation's going to make you feel the pit's your own—like you feel your backyard is.'

'All right. What about it?'

'I'm just telling you.'

There was a pause and another man said, 'There's water in 2s Gate. Getting worse.'

'It's a damn nuisance,' said Davidson, 'and I told the fireman. But he said it'd seep away into A 9s gobbing when that face passed the point of accumulation. That's what he said.'

'He was saying what he'd been told to say,' said Flasker.

There was another pause, and then the conversation got round to football pools again. In reply to a sarcastic comment by Davidson on his steady bad luck, Flasker put up a defence of the pools. 'Even if I lost all the time, I'd still be saving money. I worked it out one Sunday. The amount I'd spend on punts would be more than the coupons cost me. Instead of swilling beer like you chaps, I stay at home with the forms and drink tea.' And he proceeded to detail the figures, taking for granted that he had no choice except between filling in pool forms or drinking beer at the local as ways of spending the evening. An assumption which nobody thought of challenging.

★

They came out of the Working Men's Club, and Dick stood irresolutely. 'Wait a moment, Mike.' He couldn't make up his mind whether to return to the British Legion Hall, from which a faint thud of music could be heard. 'I don't feel much like dancing.'

'Come on back,' said Mike, taking his arm. 'You're one of the heroes the dance is being held for. You can't get out of it.'

Dick acquiesced, and they went down the street. On the noticeboards outside the hall were small posters advertising the fact that the Labour Party was giving a dance of welcome home to the men demobbed from the army, that the local M.P. would say a few words, and that a raffle would be held. Inside, the dance was in full swing, with the musicians pounding away on the dais and the floor crowded with couples. Dick and Mike stood on the edge, watching.

'Well, the speech is over,' said Mike.

'That's something to the good.'

At the end, over the dais, were Union Jacks, with the French Tricolour and the Stars and Stripes interspersed, and signs *Welcome*

Back to England, Home, and Beauty and Welcome to Civvy Street, with a painting of Clasped Hands in which the fingers were ruddily tubular. Dick watched the dancers and then looked again at the flags.

'Don't see any Hammer and Sickle.'

'That's old Harwood, you know how anti-Russian he is,' said Mike, referring to the secretary of the local Labour Party Branch.

'I know he's anti-communist, but that doesn't give him the right to leave the Russians out of the war.'

'It doesn't give him the right,' said Mike, grinning, 'but it gives him the power.'

'Somebody ought to raise it.'

'Yes, but somebody won't.'

Dick wanted to go on talking about the omission of the Soviet flag, all his feeling of the evening's emptiness was now focused on this point. I'm not talking politics, he wanted to say, I'm just thinking of all those millions of Russians killed in the war, while Charley Harwood probably never heard even a single bomb. And so Harwood's act in excluding the Soviet flag seemed to express the unstated agreement (he almost thought of it as a conspiracy) to ignore the war and all it had meant. The agreement which he had chafed against from his moment of arrival in England, and which had given him such resentment at the civilian population, especially people like Alice and Joseph. And though, after his break with Pat and his going down the pit, he had almost lost this emotion of bitter opposition, it now came back in a violent resurgence.

But Mike went edging off along the wall, and Dick turned back moodily to the dance, bumping into a young girl with a brown-skinned friendly face. 'Don't apologise,' she said. 'You're Dick Baxter, aren't you?'

'That's me.'

She indicated the slogan over the dais. 'How do you like England, Home, and Beauty?'

'The Beauty's all right,' he said.

She had wide grey eyes, a small finely cut nose and an upper lip curling up in a continual half-smile, a rounded face and hair hanging wavily to her shoulders. And her smile warmed the tan of her face and brought out an indescribable rose flush under her eyes. Grey eyes, he thought. A sort of dawn-grey as gold as gentle. Then a sudden movement of those around shoved her against him, and she caught at his arm. 'Don't apologise,' he said. 'Let's dance.' He was feeling better as he drew her out to join the circling couples. 'But it isn't fair. You know my name and I don't know yours.'

'What name do you think would suit me?'

'I'm no good at guessing. I like facts.'

'Well, it's a fact we're dancing together.' She smiled. 'And we met before. As a punishment for forgetting, I'll make you guess.'

'How long ago? I bet it was years and years.'

There was a soft submissive warmth about her body, and at the same time a pliant strength. He wanted to hold her close, to kiss her over the ear, to say something ridiculously tender. And yet at the end of the dance he lost her. A tall, fair girl beckoned to her, and they went off towards the Ladies' Cloakroom, then Mike came up and banged him on the back and drew him into a football argument. And the grey-eyed girl did not come again into his field of vision.

Walking home with Mike in the cool night air, with the effects of his pints wearing off, he wasn't so sure that he wanted to find the girl again. She was a nice young thing, with a friendly sort of manner but she was probably on the same sort of instant good terms with another chap she encountered. After all, you can be too friendly as well as too stuck-up, he told himself.

Next day, as they were clearing away a small fall of rock, a charge-man came up and looked them over. 'You there, Dick Baxter,' he said, 'you've worked on the face, haven't you? I thought so. Come along.' As they walked down the gallery, he told Dick that work on the near coal-face was being held up because three of the hewers, as well as others of the face-workers, strippers and loaders, were away from work today. 'The lousy lot of dodgers,' he said, a burly talkative man who loved statistics. 'Getting ready for the Christmas holidays, I suppose.'

'How do you know?'

'I've heard 'em talking. Never happy unless they can get the full rebate on their income tax. Take Harry Slater—he's one who hasn't turned up. If he works three shifts he gets six pounds gross—that's five pounds ten net.' He emphasised each set of figures by spitting out some chewed tobacco. 'And as he's at a hostel, he only pays two pounds a week for full board and meals in the canteen. If he works four shifts, he gets eight pounds gross, but only six twelve net. He kicks at that. I've heard him. So he works three shifts a week, or five if he's going to the races—then he gets twelve pounds gross—eight pounds sixteen net.' He threw out the figures as though each was a blow on someone's head, a token of his superior status.

'You can't expect him to be as keen as all that to earn money for the income tax,' said Dick.

'He's letting the pit down,' said the charge-man hotly. 'How the devil can the breadth be cut in time if he thinks only of himself?'

Dick knew the stint cycle. As soon as you had a pit mechanised, you had to co-ordinate the work on the face in a way that didn't happen on board-and-pillar or where hand-picks or pneumatic picks did the work. On a long face, with a twenty-four-hour cycle, the face undercut by machines and loosened by borers and shotfirers had to be completely stripped and the conveyers had to be dismantled and put forward to the receding face by the yardage of the cut. And the main conveyers on the roads had to be enlarged to the same extent. If the conveyers couldn't be moved forward, all the coal that could be got in one shift was lost. Thus, if only half the face was cleared, all the coal at that face per shift was lost unless the face could be shorted by diagonal cuts—as was sometimes possible. The cutters on night-shifts, and the beltmen, the face-rippers, and borers had nothing to do. They might as well go home unless they set to and cleared off the coal left by the coal-getting shift.

They came up near the coal-face, which was about 150 yards long. The conveyer ran along the face, but it was still. The face-shift were waiting to hear if the chargeman was able to bring it up to anything like its full number. He began sorting out the available forces, and decided that with Dick and two other men from haulage working at filling and loading, the shift ought to be able to carry on.

Dick looked at the coal-face and felt an odd sort of excitement, a resentment at being brought along for this tough job and an elation that he was back on the face, a desire to get going on the furious attack from which he would emerge, he knew, dead-beat but with a sense of triumph. He was already looking forward to the moment when he would be able to say casually to his father, 'I was on the face today.'

The coal-cutter, that horizontal handsaw with fangs of teeth, had done its undercutting along the base, near three and a half feet in, and the coal had been loosened by blasting. One of the older miners had turned up a Davy-lamp kept for testing, and was sticking it into corners to see if it burnt blue. Dick unhooked his own lamp and his snap-can from his belt. The rubber conveyer, a couple of feet wide, began to move. One of the fillers moved in under the rock-roof with his shovel, and started, half-squatting, on the coal. 'Ah, this is going to be easy,' he said. 'It'll go like the tide.' And flung the first shovelful back round his right side.

Dick got his knee-pads fixed and joined in the shovelling, behind the fillers. The dust was already thickening, making the lamps blur. The racketing noise rose, and he strove to work at the same pace as the others; but he found himself soon doing all the things he'd once laughed at beginners for doing—he wasted his muscle power, miscalculated distances, knocked his hands and head, and tripped over a

mandril. Small bits of coal got behind his knee-pads and scraped his knees. But he went on, and something deep in him rejoiced.

When he came home exhausted that afternoon, his mother handed him a letter from the mantelpiece. He turned the envelope over and over, wondering who could be writing to him from London, then at last made the effort to open it. He turned to the second page, to see the signature, and for a while couldn't make out the large, ungainly scrawl. Then he recognised Harry Manson, and smiled. 'Good news?' said his mother, watching him.

'It's from a chap I knew in the army.'

He turned back and began to read slowly and methodically.

Dear Old Dick, I had our little gang brought back to mind by meeting Kit Swinton in London a while back—by chance. And I made another search for your address. I was going to have a shot with Care of Records, when I turned it up in the only one of the many notebooks I managed to keep; it had got behind some books on a shelf. Anyway, here I am, writing to ask if there is any chance of your passing through London. Do look me up if you're in the offing. I've been having a fairly exciting time recently, what with one thing and another—mostly nothing to do with my law course. I'd like to know how you're getting on. A mad world, my masters, but full of terrific possibilities. Great things are happening, and vile things too.

Yours ever,

Harry Manson.

Yes, that's Harry, he thought. Lots of big ideas, but no fool, all the same, I'll try to remember to drop him a line.

'Your tea's getting cold,' said Mrs Baxter.

He rubbed his knees. 'Do you remember how I slept from Friday night to Sunday morning after my first week in the pit, years ago. I'm going to do that again this week-end.'

'Ah,' said Mrs Baxter with one of her rare reminiscences of early married days, 'things aren't so bad, when all's said and done. I can remember how your father used to come back from the face and go to sleep on the hearth-rug before he'd even washed, and I couldn't wake him for hours. How scared I was the first time.'

The pub wireless had just announced that demobbing was to be slowed down. 'Jack Miller was due in a month or so,' said Mike, 'poor sod.'

'Blame the Russians,' said Old Bill.

'Oh yes, of course it's the Russians who've got the Atomic Bomb,' said Mike sarcastically. 'They're the ones flourishing it about.'

But Raxton, who worked in a mill, said, 'Have you heard how Rose Mill at Hollinwood is closing down. Forty-four thousand spindles stopped, and more to come. Don't say we're going back to the slump again. I'd rather fight the Russians than see it.'

'Get the Russians off your brain,' Mike replied. 'Have you ever heard of a system called Capitalism? That's the one thing you can't blame on the Russians.'

'Maybe it's just a trick to scare us,' said Raxton dolefully, blinking with the effort of thought. 'But we're all right while we keep our government in. We've turned the corner, and as long as the Tories don't get back, we're safe.'

For a moment the ghosts of the 'thirties hovered before them all. Mines working only a few shifts a week, cotton firms of three or four generations going bankrupt. Looms smashed with sledge hammers for scrap-iron, mills turned into factories for dog biscuits or hen coops, mills used as garages where the driving pulleys still loomed from the ceiling. Two-hundredweight iron balls dropped on engines, looms sold for under a pound if you were loon enough to bid. The Prosperity Plan! Smash ten million spindles! Weavers caddying at golf.

Dick glanced at Raxton and remembered how he'd been out of work for almost the whole 'thirties, doing the housework while his wife was weaving at the mill. Wheeling the baby out and stoning the door-step. Things that his father would have cut his throat rather than do.

Mike must have had the same thoughts. 'This report on Equal Pay—you can't say it isn't right. Think how they took the women on at the mills in the slump. And why? Because women are paid less.'

'Aye, they don't cost so much in insurance stamps neither, and they'll do a spot of extra work without squealing,' said another weaver.

'Not to mention that the tackler likes to put his arm round 'em now and then, and go a bit further if they give a giggle,' said Mike. 'It's a shame to say it, but we all know it's true. When a woman's got a family to keep together and a husband out of work, she's got to put up sometimes with more than she likes.'

'They wouldn't do it now.'

'Only a few loose bits, like Maggie who can't resist anything in trousers.'

'Aw, well,' said Raxton, 'there's nowt we can do about it. Let's talk of summat more cheerful. Time for one more round.'

As they were going out, Mike slipped some sheets of paper into

Dick's hand. 'I keep on forgetting to give you this. It's from Bertway. Mrs Utway said I was to hand it on to you.'

On the whole, the disquiet was damped down by the government statement of a Five-Year Cotton Plan and by Cripps's offer of a 2 per cent. grant for new machinery. Frowns met the few who argue that what was being done was no more than patching up a hole in boiler with chewing-gum. 'We're all right in Lancashire,' said Baxter, 'and you can't say otherwise. It's not the boom conditions we had in 1919, but it's a good steady situation. Hotheads like Frank Wilson won't set us against the government by calling it Social Democrat and saying look at Germany in 1933. Why, it's a foreign word, that Social Democratic. Just shows how un-English they are.'

'What about the old Social Democratic Federation?' asked Dick. 'I've heard you talk about it yourself.'

'S.D.F.—Silly Damn Fools,' chuckled Baxter. 'Ah, that was in the good old days. Don't talk of things outside your ken, lad. Lancashire knows a good thing when it sees it, and we're solid behind Attlee and Cripps.'

'I wasn't arguing,' said Dick.

'He doesn't know enough to argue,' said Alice to no one in particular. 'All he can do is carp and backbite. He might as well be a communist and have done with it.' She was ironing some underclothes on a collapsible ironing-table, blowing the hair off her face and every now and then looking anxiously in the small wall-mirror at a pimple forming on her chin.

Dick contented himself with a superior smile, then, feeling for his handkerchief, he remembered the letter that Mike had given him the night before, and went upstairs to read it. The house had electric light below, but gas on the upper floor. He lighted the gas-jet, which flared, coughed, whistled. He blew it out and then dropped the matches, and in trying to find where they'd fallen he knocked his head on the bedstead. So he was feeling enraged and somehow enclosed with forces of malice as he sat down to read directly under the jet, which was so weak that anywhere else in the room he strained his eyes.

The document wasn't a letter as he had thought, but was a very carefully written statement headed *What it's like in Greece*, and (in brackets) *for Mike, Dick and Any of the others*.

Police and soldiers brought into the Greek Army barracks at Tirnavos (where we were stationed) many Greek civilians—for questioning. The questioning always took place late at night, and motor-cycle engines were raced outside the building.

Now and then we saw some of these civilians. One was an elderly man. He was crawling along the ground, trying to get out of the sun. He was barefooted and the soles of his feet were like a mess of bloody rags. He didn't get any medical treatment.

We didn't complain to anyone when this sort of thing happened, as we were told that the people were bandits or communists and, anyway, 'If it's the Greeks' custom to do that sort of thing to their prisoners we can't stop it.'

Once thirty girls and women were brought into the camp. Most of the girls came from Timavos, and we knew them by sight. One, a cripple, who could only walk if she had two sticks, we used to see nearly every night. One of the young women was pregnant.

These girls were questioned in the early afternoon, and for some reason the motor-cycles weren't started up. We heard the piercing screams from the building, on and on.

Smuth, the C.O.'s driver, saw the cripple girl beaten up. Soldiers were doing the beatings. They'd taken the sticks away from the girl and were lashing her across the face and the stomach, again and again. We saw four girls carried out by the other girls, and one girl had an eye hanging out on her cheek.

The screams nearly drove us mad. L/Cpl Soames, R.A.S.C., Driver P. Jackson, R.A.S.C., Pte Smuth and myself tried to get hold of Tommy-guns to go and stop the beatings. Our C.Q.M.S., Sgt Scott, wouldn't let us have them.

All our officers were out at the time, and many of the British troops had gone swimming. When the officers came back, we protested and they got medical aid for the girls.

Next day the girls were taken away in trucks under armed guard. We never saw any of them again. The only reason that was ever given for their being beaten up was that they belonged to an ELAS unit during the occupation years and had carried out sabotage against the Germans. So they were suspected communists.

Another time, at Larissa, a Welsh soldier named Evans and his girl friend were arrested by the Greek police and taken off in a police truck with other Greek civilians. I followed in the Liberty Truck I was driving that night, and with me were five Lovat Scouts. All the way to the station we were covered from the police truck by a Bren and by Tommy-guns held by the police. We were unarmed, in B.M.M. it is a standing order that firearms will never be in possession of N.C.O.s or other ranks unless on guard duties.

Dick stopped reading and sat thinking hard for a while, then sighed deeply, frowning, and returned to the reading.

On arrival at the police station we were shown into the Static Officer's room where Evans had been taken. His girl friend had been herded with the other civilians in a room nearby. We were in the station about an hour before Evans and his girl friend were released.

While we were there, a door into our room was opened—presumably by someone who didn't know of our presence. One of the Lovat Scouts told me to look into the next room. I looked. Two policemen were holding a man against the wall, while another was hitting him with a club. His face was one mass of blood and he was moaning feebly. The door was shut as soon as we were seen.

While we were at the station we tried to get them to release another girl whom the police had arrested. She came from the café just outside the camp gate at Larissa. The police agreed, but she refused to come. She told us that if she came with us, the police would pick her up later and beat her. I never saw that girl again in Larissa.

Evans and his girl friend were set free and came away with us. Later that night Evans was placed under close arrest for stealing a Tommy-gun. His girl had told him how she was beaten up at the station. He had meant to go back and shoot the policeman who had beaten her.

Next day the Lovat Scouts were placed on a charge of forcibly entering the police-station and being out after hours. I had to give evidence at the trial, and I was reprimanded by the C.O., Colonel Myers. He told me that I must never interfere with the Greek police, but I answered that after what I had seen of their methods, I could never leave any British person in their hands.

He then told me that the stories of beatings by the police were greatly exaggerated, but I told him that I had witnessed too much with my own eyes to believe that.

On various times we've been lectured by the C.O. on never giving information to anyone asking.

I have left out lots of atrocities and such-like. But these two stories will give you some idea of what's happening here. Can't you do anything about it?

Dick sat for several minutes without stirring, staring at the wall opposite. Then with another deep sigh he pocketed the letter, changed his clothes and went downstairs.

Baxter glanced at his son. 'Aye, all dressed up, laid out like lamb and sallet, as they used to say of the pretty wenches in my young days. If one of us had shown as much interest in his clothes as you all do nowadays, he'd have been tossed in the canal.'

'Hold your tongue,' said Mrs Baxter kindly. 'Times have changed, and it does nobody any harm to take a proper pride in being neat. There's no rule of foul without and fair within.'

'All the same, we'd have rated it a sin to squander our brass on fine feathers, without a thought of the times to come.' He laughed. 'Aye, and we never dreamed we'd see the day when there'd be clinics for varicose veins, only because the shops must sell fine stockings to all the flighty wives that'd be better engaged counting the grey hairs on their tops.'

'I've never been to no clinic for varicose veins,' objected Mrs Baxter.

'Ah, you can't take a joke. That's a woman all over. Can't take a joke against herself.'

'Well, I'll be back soon,' said Dick, and went out.

Rain had been falling, but now it had stopped. The cobbles of the old market-place glistened under the electric light. He paused by the old iron pump on the stone base that was spread with vegetables on market days and evenings. Somebody had left an evening paper, and he turned it over with his foot, noting the headline about the five hundred soldiers who refused to embark in Glasgow at King George's Dock for Singapore. He stood staring at the print, and half-stooped to pick the paper up, but didn't. As though breaking a spell, he tore his eyes away and looked out over the square, which seemed all the more desolate when compared with its busy self on a summer market evening. Laden stalls, trestle-tables, bawling huxters and insidious quacks, radios sending out the Light Programme and gramophones playing jazz records, naphtha flares spluttering over the moving crowd of buyers and starers. Lads with carefully tilted caps, short jackets, and shining shoes, balanced on the kerb-edge, eyeing girls and reading out sports results, girls in short skirts and high-heeled shoes parading arm-in-arm and uneasily mingling disdain with provocation. And ten years ago he had been one of the lads with no thought in the world but the girls and the sports results.

Well, what had changed? Himself, or the world? or both?

Knight the plumber went by with his work-bag in a hurry, and old Mr Williams, bent and twisted with his rheumatism, walked slowly across the market-place, leaning on one stick and holding the other behind his back. Dick moved towards the market-hall, and saw Mike between two girls. One of the girls was his Mary: her broad shoulders and the brown hair in a thick plait round her head were easily recognisable. The other was familiar, yet hard to place. Only when they stopped and she looked Dick full in the face did he remember.

'Just the man we wanted to see,' said Mike. 'Here I am with twice

as much as my arms can enfold. You'll never hear me say that a mow of hay's as soft in my arms as my old wench. With some of these skinny bits a chap could hold two and still have room, but nobody could say that of Mary.'

'Ever since I give up smoking,' said Mary with a laugh, 'I've been putting on weight, and it was Mike who said I ought to stop.'

'Hallo,' said Dick to the other girl, 'where did you get to at that dance?'

'Where did you get to yourself?' she replied.

'Did you look out by the shed at the back?' asked Mike with a wink. 'Under the bushes there. That's where two go in and three come out.'

'Not in such weather,' objected Mary. 'You're thinking of the summer nights.'

'You're a thought-reader,' said Mike, squeezing her arm. 'Well, come on, Dick. Tell us what we're going to do. Pictures or no pictures, that's the question.'

'What about introducing me first,' said Dick.

'But you've just been talking like old friends.'

'All the same, you'd better introduce me. Then if I lose her again, I'll know whose name to call out.'

'Joan Wittock,' said Mike, 'meet my old friend Dick Baxter, and I hope you don't make a habit of losing him.'

'I remember you now,' said Dick, shaking her hand. 'You used to be a friend of Alice's. But no wonder I didn't know you. In those days you were as thin as a rake.' He laughed. 'What about that afternoon at Blackpool when you and Alice were playing leapfrog, and your bathing-costume split!'

'That's a nice thing to bring up against a poor girl, years after she wept about it,' said Joan. 'I was so ashamed of that swim-suit. It got tighter and flimsier every year, but we never seemed to get round to buying a new one. And then you all laughed so rudely.'

'Fancy thinking you needed an introduction,' said Mike.

So Joan was soon walking a few paces behind Mary and Mike, talking with Dick about the mill where she worked; and he felt strangely happier. He liked the soft, easy swing of her body, her full mouth, her soft laughter that seemed to come from right inside her. Both Pat and Alice, he realised, had tightened lips; and he somehow felt that Joan's big mouth, with its ready smile, was the emblem of a generous nature.

After a street-corner argument, they decided to go to the cinema. Dick watched the film in a half-distract way. It was about a wise-cracking journalist who got mixed up in the exposure of some city

racket and fell in love with the big crook's innocent daughter. Other blurred and evanescent images kept thrusting in between his eyes and the screen. The sleepy market-place suddenly noisy with lorries from which jumped the soldiers with Brens and machine-guns, firing into the windows; Sam and Mike strung from the big oaks in the park; Joan screaming as a policeman bashed her face in against a wall, Mary moaning as the tenth man raped her on the cobbles. And Pat watching through a window, and Alice walking down the street arm-in-arm with one of the soldiers. Who were the invaders? He closed his eyes and his sense of inner trouble increased. Who? But it's going on already. They're here, all round us; only they're not yet in the open, as they are in Greece. They're the enemy I've felt ever since I landed at Liverpool, ambushed in all the shadows, in every cranny of greed.

He reached and took Joan's hand, and she didn't pull it away. And at once he felt relieved. The conflicting images began to fade, and he saw the screen again. He fondled her hand, traced the strong, gentle fingers, the rounded ball of the thumb, and circled the strong wrist. He twined his fingers with hers, and pressed her hand down on her thigh. 'Joan,' he murmured under his breath, almost a cry for help; and she may have heard him, since she tightened her fingers a moment.

12

Tyneside

THE WORKS CONFERENCE was as tedious as he had expected. The management thought the matter important enough to call in the Federation representative to oppose the Union official, and if there was one person Emery detested more than another, it was Stephenson, the Federation's most expert arguer. Meadows the manager was away in London, and Hargreaves the under-manager was in the chair, with his sleek manner imposed on a bullying note, a self-made man with a mixture of cringing and harshness. However, in the chair he had little to do except listen to Stephenson and Emery.

Stephenson brought out all the usual arguments. The job wasn't a skilled man's job. Where was the precedent? Where was anything laid down to the contrary? No, any unprejudiced consideration of customs must lead to the conclusion that the job was unskilled. So there was nothing wrong in putting the man Gilroy on the machine, and none of the evidence brought forward by the Union disproved this contention. Besides, the Relaxation Agreement provided for such an issue. You might say it was drawn up explicitly to cover the Gilroy case.

Emery, who knew it all beforehand, sat studying Stephenson himself, his complacent face and his obvious enjoyment in rolling out the time-worn phrases, never using one short word when he could find a dozen large ones. A kind of pseudo-legal jargon mixed up with glibly used technical terms. Yet, like all these Federation men, Stephenson, while giving a spurious effect of knowing the engineering industry inside out, couldn't have tackled the simplest of the jobs he talked about. The impatience and contempt that Emery had felt for such types had been born in shop-steward days and had persisted unimpaired. Stephenson stood up to talk, pressing with spread-out fingers on the table and leaning forward to emphasise a phrase, but making no gestures. Only, his voice grew a trifle more unctuous and he glanced at Hargreaves when he felt he had made a telling point about a machine that he wouldn't recognise if he saw it. His dark blue suit was up-to-date enough, but a touch of old respectabilities lingered in the tall starched collar, which tightly imprisoned his throat. Hargreaves, who was running slightly to fat, like an athlete who'd given up training, was doodling on a pad, nodding now and then without looking up.

Emery came in again with his rebuttals, denials, demands. As he spoke, he felt himself unusually on edge, unable to maintain the impersonally smug tone of Stephenson. Benson, the shop-steward with the scar, who was also on the Union's District Committee, was listening among the workers' representatives, cocking his head on one side. And Emery almost felt that he was arguing his case against Benson rather than Stephenson and Hargreaves. He couldn't resist making the crack about men who talked for an hour about a machine that they wouldn't know if they saw it, and who had all the customs of the engineering trades at their finger-tips but had never once clocked in at an engineering works.

Hargreaves told him that that was hardly material to the dispute; and Emery, annoyed, went on to hint that the efforts to put unskilled workmen on skilled machines were part of a calculated scheme of dilution which couldn't be looked on lightly by the Union. Hargreaves again rebuked him without looking up from his doodling. 'Let's keep to the point, Mr Emery. We're discussing the custom and practice of a specific set of instances.'

Stephenson intimated that extraneous issues and political red-herrings were being introduced into the inquiry, but he for one had a clear conscience and clean hands.

Emery had to control his impulse to say something violent. At the moment he didn't know which he disliked more, the grinning Stephenson or the critical-eyed Benson. For the first time in his career

he felt opposed both to the management with their efforts to cut rates, and to the workers with their efforts to maintain old customs. One side was all set for a ruthless drive into increased profits by means of U.S.A. rationalisation, cheap labour, simplified methods; the other side resisted by seeking to hold intact a complex system of old scales and standards as the barrier against wage-cuts, dilution, unemployment. What was needed was a Cripps who wasn't a namby-pamby, or a Morrison who really knew something, someone who could bang sense into the heads of both sides and make them realise that a Labour Government had come to stay. Then perhaps they'd stop the useless tug-of-war and play their parts in the new economy. And then he himself wouldn't have to go on arguing about involved and outworn issues as though the year was still 1939—or 1839. The management was wrong because they were actuated by wage-cutting schemes, not any all-round concept of efficiency, the workers were wrong because they were actuated by blind fears, which led them to defend dead customs instead of seeking to lead the way into new and solidly based rationalisations.

He ended, and Hargreaves turned to Stephenson. 'Do you want to add anything to that, Mr Stephenson?'

'No, Mr Hargreaves.' Stephenson gathered up his papers. 'I think I have shown irrefutably that the machine cannot be rated as skilled. All the customs of the industry go against such an interpretation. My arguments have been met by rhetorical subterfuges, not by relevant facts.'

Hargreaves looked with slightly watering eyes at Emery, who shook his head. 'We cannot possibly accept the contention. The matter must go further.'

'Very well,' said Hargreaves, sitting up straight. 'There's nothing more we can do about it at this level.'

He glanced at the workers, who rose and went out. Emery, without bothering to nod to Stephenson, followed them and caught up with Benson. 'Well, what about it?'

Benson grimaced. 'We'll have to follow up, but Gilroy himself got so bitter he tore his card up.'

'And then?'

'Joined the Transport and General.'

Emery wanted to point out to Benson that there was nothing to grin about. Gilroy's act brought out the point that he, Emery, had made in the bar: You shouldn't knock back one worker to maintain the standards of others. The A.E.U.'s loss of one man, the increase by one man of the top-heavy T. and G.W.U., were trivial matters in themselves; but Emery felt that the episode had its wider meaning, its

warning against narrow and antiquated craft attitudes. And Benson had given very little help at the conference; he might have weighed in with detailed comments that only a worker in the establishment could know. . . . But he restrained himself. I've been giving away too much lately of what I think and feel, he mused. Nobody thanks me for my honesty. If I don't look out, I'll be in the soup, with both management and men against me. 'I'll be seeing you,' he said to Benson, turning towards the main entrance.

Benson entered the machine-shop with its dozen benches on which were mounted various small machines worked by girls and men. He went round the side where stood the larger machines. 'Seen Saul?' he asked a girl with a red handkerchief round her head. She nodded towards one of the side-rooms, and he went over.

Saul was coming out with some tools for electrical work. 'Hallo,' he said. 'What happened?'

But at that moment the loud-speaker burst raucously out, 'Calling Mr Rogers. Calling Mr Rogers. Will he come at once to the main office?'

The girls on the bench nearby retorted loudly, glad at the excuse to break the monotony, 'Shurrup, you dafue! . . . Calling your Grannie! . . . Cut it out!' Benson went closer to Saul.

'Nothing definite of course,' he said across the noise. 'Sent on to Local Conference.'

'How did Emery do?'

'Fidgety and sharp. He said some good things, I must admit; but he didn't seem to have his mind on it.'

'Oh, these mudget Mussolims,' said Saul. 'Somehow I wouldn't trust that chap further than I could throw a bull by the tail.'

'There's worse,' said Benson. 'But I agree we'll have to try to shift him next time. I'm seeing Morris tonight.'

He passed on, towards the farther end of the shop, humming to himself. A girl at a tapping machine stopped work to adjust the handkerchief round her head. 'Hallo, Jack,' she said, rousing herself. 'Eee, I do hate the time between dinner and tea. It drags and it drags. After tea it's not so bad. . . .' She yawned.

He picked up one of the nuts from the box in front of her machine and looked in the screw-hole for the threads. 'Nice work.' She watched his movements with a vague interest.

'What's that you've got?'

'One of the nuts you've been cutting.'

'Me?'

He showed her. 'Don't say you didn't know.'

She yawned again. 'And why, no I didn't, Jack. I've only been on this machine six months. I never looked. It's nowt to dee wi' me. divent set the machine.' All the same she gave the threads cut in the screw-hole another glance, then threw the scrap of metal back in the box. 'Why can't you make the clock gan roond quicker? I'm gannor oot the night, A've a date.' Then, as the chargehand was coming her way, she turned back to the machine, and Benson went on.

★

There was a timid knock on the back door. 'Come in,' Jean called. A young girl with a large printed handkerchief over her head slipped into the kitchen. 'Your knock sounds like a wee mouse scrabbling and scratching at a dried-up onion,' said Jean, wiping her hands on her blue apron. 'Don't look so deathly pale, my pretty, or I'll send you about your business.'

'Oh, no,' said the girl; 'please don't, Mrs Emery.'

'How often must I tell you I was christened Jean? You make me feel like my own grandmother, calling me Mrs Emery thus and Mrs Emery that. Call me, Jean, or I won't answer.'

'Oh, please, Jean.'

'That's better.' She patted the girl's cheek. 'I'm only teasing you, Annie. You know what a soft spot I have for young fools in love with ugly minded old parents sitting on their tails. I'd turn myself out before I'd turn you out, when you've arranged to meet your Harry in my kitchen. Tell me what you told your mother.'

Annie trembled slightly and lifted her thin chin. 'I told her I was going to Mary about her taking the Sunday-school class, seeing how I've got to visit my grannie, but I've told Mary already, I saw her when I was going the messages yesterday.'

'You see how it all works out for the best. Why don't you run away with this Harry of yours?'

Annie trembled again. 'They'd put the police on me. We did think of asking a magistrate's permission, but I couldn't stand the strain of waiting. Oh, I couldn't. I wish I was four years older. I wish I was grown up.'

'Does the old sinner beat you?'

'No, no, he doesn't beat me,' cried Annie, trembling all over. 'I wouldn't mind if that was all. I——'

'Still, I can see a bruise on your arm,' said Jean, and Annie tried to pull her sleeve down. 'I'll trip that old devil up some day.'

'He thinks he's doing right,' said Annie.

'So does Bevin,' Jean replied, putting her arm round the girl. 'Now, now, you've got to be smiling for this Harry of yours.' She mused.

'I still can't make out why your Harry doesn't bash the old devil, law or no law.'

'I'm afraid he'll do something and get into trouble. So I only tell him a bit.'

'Come on now, pour yourself out a cup. It's still drinkable.'

Annie bustled about, looking happier. 'You're sure Mr Emery won't come in?'

'He's in York again, my dear.'

'Oh yes.' She poured out the tea and took the lump of sugar that Jean handed her. Then she weakened again. 'I don't know what I'll do if he finds out I didn't go and see Mary.'

'Don't go worrying about what may never happen, or you're lost. Father used to say: If one of my children tells me a lie, it proves I'm someways wrong, for it's tyrants that breed liars.'

'I can't imagine a father like that,' said Annie, stirring her tea and sitting down at the kitchen table. 'It's like something out of a book.'

'Yes, sometimes when I look round on the world, I can hardly believe it myself. There aren't many like him. But it puts a sore responsibility on a child, Annie. You've got to grow up worthy of such a father, and I fear that nowadays I'm falling far behind what he'd ask of me.'

'Tell me some more about him,' Annie begged.

'He wasn't a big man—about my height,' said Jean in a meditative voice. She stood up as she spoke. 'He always had a twinkling in his eyes, except when he was angry. And nothing made him angry but cruelty and injustice.' Annie trembled but didn't speak, and Jean went on. 'The men he admired most were Keir Hardie and Edward Carpenter.'

Annie shook her head. 'Who were they?'

'I'll tell you some day. I used to learn by heart the things they'd written. He loved to hear me saying them.'

'I heard the long roar and surge of History, wave after wave—of the never-ending surf along the immense coast-line of West Africa.'

'I heard the world-old cry of the downtrodden and outcast; I saw them advancing always to victory.'

'Always to victory,' she repeated. 'Always to victory. It's hard to believe sometimes.'

'It sounded fine,' said Annie. 'The way you said it.'

'Heaven forgive me,' said Jean. 'I put a question-mark to it. Ah yes, Annie, I'm falling away, I'm falling. I must watch my step.'

'That was in Glasgow, wasn't it?' said Annie, keen to show how much she remembered. 'How did you come to Newcastle?'

'Mother was born here. She came back after father died.'

'I see,' replied Annie, nodding. 'Would you like to go back to Glasgow?'

But Jean recited another passage from Carpenter's *Towards Democracy*, half to herself:

'Villeins and thralls become piece-men and datal men, and the bondsmen of the land become the bondsmen of Machinery and Capital; the escaped convicts of Labour fit admiringly the bracelets of Wealth round their own wrists.'

And she illustrated the words by gyving her left wrist with the fingers of her right hand. Annie, who had caught the words but not the meaning, remarked, 'You make it look more like handcuffs than bracelets.' Then a rat-tat on the door turned her pale, and she clasped her hands over her left breast. 'Oh, I pray to Jesus Christ it isn't father.'

Jean let in a young fellow of about nineteen or twenty with a heavy bony face and curly fair hair. 'Come in, Harry. She's eating her heart out for you.'

He stepped in, flapping his cap against his thigh. 'Thanks, Mrs Emery—'

Jean interrupted, 'Tell him, Annie.'

'She says you've got to call her Jean,' said Annie, brightening.

'I was kept,' said Harry. 'I could have knocked old Andrews down, but there I was, saying Yessir and No-sir a quarter of an hour after time. Eee, I could have knocked him down.'

'You're here now, Harry,' said Jean, taking off her apron. 'So make the most of it. I'm going round to give Mrs Timson her embrocation.'

'You won't be long,' said Annie timidly.

'Not long enough, honey.'

She looked at the young lovers, who were trying to be polite and get rid of her without hurting her feelings; and the little speech she'd prepared for Harry's benefit died in her heart. Bless them, what need have I to go saying she's a tender thing and must be treated accordingly, and I expect him to be as true as though they were married three times over? She took a shawl from a nail behind the door, and went out.

Three doors down, she went in through the backyard and entered the scullery without knocking. She looked in a cupboard and then went to the other end of the kitchen. 'It's only me, Ellen. Have you got the bottle upstairs? A muffled reply sounded from the bedroom. Jean snorted and went up. 'Where's the bottle of embrocation?'

'It's in there,' said Ellen Timson, small and dark with a turned-up nose and cleft chin, indicating the small cupboard in the bedside table. 'Ah, what a life it is. How often have I said to myself: I'd sell my soul for a whole day in bed—and now I've been here three days and I feel I'm going out of my wits.'

Jean took out the bottle. 'You'd better send Elsie for another one tomorrow.' She took out the cork. 'Still smells like floor-polish and vinegar.' She put the bottle down on the table and pulled the bed-clothes down. 'How's the linen holding out? I'll take some sheets back and wash 'em for you. Upsy-daisy, gentle does it.' She drew up Ellen's nightdress. 'Yours are just like mine—a good pull means a good tear. And now over on your stomach, honey.' She took some of the embrocation on the palm of her hand and began rubbing it in with regular movements, round and round. 'You shouldn't be laid-up like this at your age. But, then, what's the use of saying that with a sieve of a roof and fungus growing up between the floorboards?'

There was a sound of someone tumbling and clattering on the stairs. Elsie burst into the room. 'Oh, mum, Mr Shap came home roaring and bellowing and Sim says he's giving his wife a bash.'

Jean stood up, wiping her hands on a handkerchief. 'Here, Elsie, you have a try at embrocation. I suppose I'd better go and stop Les Shap. That fool of a wife of his gets so scared she'll incite him to murder some day.'

'What a one you are, Jean,' said Ellen, talking into the pillow, with her dark hair loose over her face. 'Always rushing into other people's troubles.'

'It's not that I haven't any of my own,' said Jean. 'I'll come back in ten minutes to finish the rubbing and tell you all about the Shaps, drat 'em.' What do I think I am? she asked herself as she went downstairs. I'm just an interfering old woman; it's high time I did some proper work and some proper fighting instead of pretending I'm God's gift to suffering Newcastle.

Benson was sitting at the table in the anteroom, dozing over a copy of *Punch*. He started and gave a stifled grunt when Emery tapped him on the back. 'Have they got round to it yet?' Emery asked, looking towards the panelled door behind which the A.E.U. Executive and the Executive of the Federation were discussing sundry matters, among which the dispute over Gilroy and his machine was included, somewhere low down on the list. Other idlers in the room stared at Emery, not because they were the least bit interested in him and what he was saying, but because anything, even Emery, varied the tedium.

'No, I don't think so,' said Benson, running his finger up and down

the scar which he had got years ago on a welding job. He yawned and looked at his watch. 'Not for an hour or so, I should say.'

'I'll go for another stroll.'

'This time I'll join you,' said Benson, rising. He went to the stand for his hat and coat. 'Have you been to the Minster?'

'Not this time.'

'I told my brother-in-law I'd have a look. He's a smart youngster, wants to be an architect. He's got a book of the Cathedrals of England and he brought it over when he heard I was coming to York. I suppose there's a guide or something. I'd like to buy him a copy. Otherwise he'll keep on asking me questions I can't answer.'

They went down the steps of the hotel, and Emery led Benson across the road. 'Have a look at that,' he said, halting and pointing back. 'It's what they call sham-gothic, I believe. Well, one of the General Workers was in the same sort of fix as you are, his wife wanted to hear all about the Minster. I've got to see that blasted Minster, he kept on saying. But one drink led to another, and about eleven o'clock as we came up this way, he stopped and took a good look—it was a windy night, full moon. There's the Minster, he says, I can tell it from the photos that Emily's got.'

'You might have chosen Race Week,' said Benson. 'Then the trip would have been worth while.'

'I didn't choose the date,' said Emery. 'That's between the Lord and the Executive.'

He wasn't feeling at all happy. At the Local Conference he had spoken more strongly than he'd meant, and he wondered how some of his remarks would read now at the Central Conference. The whole set-up of the Local Conference always irritated him. The fact that it was held at the offices of the Employers' Association stressed the effect of the Union coming as a suppliant. The Union had 'failed to agree,' it was coming cap in hand to the Employers to beg for the disputed action to be stopped or reversed. Well, not quite as bad as that, but near enough. And the formal genteel atmosphere was enough to freeze a welding flame. You felt yourself in the very den of money power. And this time the whole thing had been particularly exasperating, with that pompous fool Sir James Tampion in the chair, never hearing anything when he thought it'd shake the T.U. speaker to be forced to repeat his words. And one of the assistant secretaries of the Association, Arbuthnot, speaking on behalf of Crow's, a nasty piece of work with a fishy eye and a pouncing manner, who enjoyed changing his voice from rasping interrogation to the suavest of addresses, 'You see, Sir James. . . . ' No fool; as shrewd as could be. He had the knack of leaving Emery hot under the collar, and he knew it. And

that made Emery speak louder than he meant, made him say things that were true enough but not the sort of thing to say in that chilly place, where the man who lost his temper soon put himself in the wrong. And all he said was written neatly and undeniably down by the shorthand writer hired from an independent firm, who listened with an unvarying mixture of boredom and intentness to every syllable breathed. Well, thought Emery, at least I've had my own back or someone, getting Benson tied up in the matter. At the District he's in the position of having forced the issue; it's identified with him.

They went into the next pub they encountered. 'This is my first time in York,' said Benson for the *n*th time. 'You've got to have a well-lined wallet if you're going to drink in *The Station*. I'm glad I took your advice and booked a room at *The William IV*.'

'Have you got your luggage ready? I'm going to make a dash for the train if the decision comes through in the next couple of hours.'

'I've got it down in the porter's charge.'

'You'll need a taxi. The simplest thing is to take it over to the station in the morning by bus.'

Benson raised his glass. 'Thanks, Bill. I've been glad of this chance to know you a bit better.'

Emery responded. 'Oh, I know, Jack. Do you think I can't smell the things you chaps say about the paid officials? I've said 'em all myself in my day, and meant 'em, too. And to a certain extent we bureaucrats deserve it. I'd like a pound for every oath I swore about not losing touch with the lads in the workshop and all that. But it's hard. It's impossible under the present set-up to keep properly in touch. You can't do it, Jack, no matter how you try, when you're pushed here, there, and the other place. You can't do it just by going to as many branch meetings as the week has days. You can't do it by having drinks with the lads after hours.'

'There's a lot in what you say,' said Benson, squinting into his glass and becoming sententious with his desire to express sympathy. 'It's only when you get socialism that the trade unions can really become vehicles of the workers' will. But that doesn't mean we twiddle our thumbs and wait till Mr Bloody Attlee gives us socialism on a silver plate.'

'Of course not,' said Emery, happily. 'We've got to keep on fighting all the while to make the broken ends meet—you know what I mean. Bargaining and arbitration and manoeuvring for positions within the present set-up, and fighting for the great day.'

'Yes, Bill, but what matters is how you lay the emphasis. Morrison himself would agree with what you say, as long as all the emphasis is put on the first half of your proposition.'

'I'm the last to deny it. But there's got to be an inter-linking of the two lines of strategy, all the same. Now perhaps I'm judging you from myself, Jack. I can't forget how suspicious and carping I was about all the Union bureaucrats when I was in the shop. I won't go so far as to say all such suspicions and carpings are unfounded, but I'd be a damned liar if I didn't admit I now see I was often wrong—I simply didn't understand how chaps were doing their best under difficult circumstances—hammered-at on all sides.'

'Come round with the boys more, Bill. That's all you need. We've got to close our ranks. Now's the danger-point. There's dirty work being prepared all round us.' Benson hiccapped. 'Can't say I like this beer much.' He clapped Emery on the shoulder. 'My turn now.' They both felt a bit sheepish after the serious tone of their remarks, which the many whiskies and pints of the day had blurred with a kind of apologetic bonhomie.

Emery watched Benson as he turned to the bar. Seen from the back, his head looked small and fragile, with soft thinning hair and large red ears sticking out; his crown was bald and his neck scraggy, with holes marking the spots of bad boils. Yes, the beer was making him conciliatory, but the very terms in which his good wishes were couched revealed his suspicions, his antagonism. All the same, Emery wasn't displeased. He'd managed to produce the effect on the District Committee of identifying Benson with the Gilroy case. If the Union won, Benson would get most of the kudos; but if it lost—a much more likely if—then he'd get all the discredit, not Emery. How much of these tactics he had grasped, Emery wasn't sure, but he was inclined to think that Benson had been so carried away by the case as to feel he had managed to edge Emery out of the main picture.

A tall, alert man whom Emery recognised as an official of the National Shipping Agency was drinking a whisky by himself, keeping his eyes and ears open. Close by, three representatives of the General Workers and an A.E.U. man from Sheffield were exchanging stories.

Benson turned round with the drinks. 'Here, Bill.'

'You must come round and see us some time,' replied Emery. 'Bring the mussus with you, and we'll have a sing-song. I'll give you *Cushy Butterfield*, and my Jean knows a lot of Scottish songs—her old man was a bit of a nationalist, but a fine old chap, I should say. He worked with McLean and Jimmy Maxton.'

'Thanks, I will,' said Benson. 'That sounds just my cup of tea.'

'I thought I saw Bone over there, but it wasn't.'

'I don't know anyone who can make me laugh like he can. I was in fits yesterday evening. But they say he's a hard worker.'

'Yes, it's just that he can't help being a yell. He's one of those chaps

who start off a legend and then spend the rest of their lives running after it. He only has to drink a pint, and the tale gets round that he picked up a barrel with his teeth. Did you ever hear about the time he arrived at Pittsford Hall?'

'No, what was it?'

'He came in by an evening train, and got read in by book, bell, and candle. The usual statement of duties on the Executive, with a few extra touches thrown in for such a character. You've got to be a good boy now, you can't throw the book of rules out of the window when it suits you. You may be a communist, but you've got to remember the dignity, etcetera, of being a member of the A.E.U. Executive—all that in the correct phrases and innuendos, of course.'

'I get you,' said Benson.

'Well, there he was, fidgeting and lifting his eyebrows, and waiting for the lecture to stop. At last it really did. Now, Mr Bone, I have no doubt you're hungry after your journey, you can go down and have a good meal in the dining-room. So up jumped Bone and made for the door, turning round for his one comment. Aren't you afraid, brother, that I'll rape the cook?'

Benson roared with laughter. 'I can see it. Aye, I can see it.'

Three hours later the panelled doors opened and out came Haskins. 'Oh, hullo, Emery, that case of yours has been disposed of.'

'You know Benson?' Emery replied, knowing from Haskins's manner what the verdict was going to be. 'It's his case, too. In fact, it's far more his than mine. He's put most of the work into it.'

Benson smiled, 'Aw, now, Bill.'

'I'm sorry,' said Haskins, turning grave, 'but we couldn't get away with it. I don't need to tell you we fought our hardest—we recognise that Brother Benson raised an important matter when he fought on this issue. It's linked with a much broader problem of struggle against rate-cutting, and that's what we in there have got to keep in mind. You know the Federation will always give way on a small point when they can use it again later on something bigger. That's why we have to watch our step. But we fought for this issue on a matter of principle, and we won't forget it. Still, for the moment it's off the agenda, brothers. We couldn't get a mutual recommendation.' He shook hands with Benson and Emery, and went back into the farther room.

'Well, that's that,' muttered Benson. 'I can't say I feel satisfied . . . but I suppose . . .'

'You can comment as you like in your report-back to the District,' said Emery. 'But don't forget you've got to get your luggage. Mine's at the station.'

Benson nodded. 'Thanks for reminding me.' They went out of the hotel without any more words, and Emery stood on the steps watching Benson hurry down the road. Well, now I've crowned him with the failure; quite neatly, too. And I've escaped a District Committee. Two days out of my area, four days' delegation money, and something saved by staying at *The William IV*.

As he stood there computing his financial and other gains, a woman came down the steps at his side. Her scent seemed familiar. He turned and saw it was the girl whom the journalist had called Belinda. She gave him a flashing smile—right to the back-teeth, he told himself—and for the moment he wavered. He had got rid of Benson and could easily think up a story about missing the train. But he couldn't quite bring himself to the decision. He hadn't been unfaithful to Jean since their marriage, though he'd come near it a few times. Especially over the last year he'd felt the need to break out, to restore something of the self-confidence which Jean kept wearing down with her continual belittling of his manhood. Only once, he told himself, and took a step after Belinda, who was wagging her behind as if she knew the conflict going on in his mind.

Why not? Was it a moral qualm, a genuine wish to be faithful to Jean? Or was it an admission that Jean's belittlement was justified? He turned away from the sight of the wagging behind that was growing smaller, more distant, more forbidden. Next time, he thought, and to his surprise a violent spasm of desire heaved through his body.

No, I'll get my bag and have a beer at the station bar. Beer, the good old narcotic.

★

'Haven't you got it all worked out yet, Wilf?' Emery asked, as Wilfred Rose, his only close friend in the office, made some final jottings on the back of his programme.

Wilf grinned down his long nose. 'It's done, William, it's done. Our fortunes are made, or unmade.'

The white-overalled girls were leading the lean slouching dogs into the arena under the harsh cones of light. The people around were leaning over and craning their necks to see the odds given by the bookies along the rail. Just ahead of Emery a short girl kept jumping up; a man caught her under the arms and held her in the air, against his chest. When at last he let her down, she gave him a startled glance. 'Oh—oo, I thought it was Bob. Where's Bob gone?'

'Bob's your uncle,' said the man.

'Can you see the odds?' asked Wilf, whose eyesight was short. Then, studying his notes, 'Now don't bet on trap three, whatever's in it.'

'Why,' asked Emery, trying to listen to what the girl and the stranger who had slipped into Bob's place were saying.

'I don't know. It must open a shade slower or something. I've reckoned it all out. The chances of a winner from trap three are very small.' In reply to Emery's inquiring eyebrow he began to explain his system, or rather to explain what it wasn't; for he was very shy of saying exactly how he worked his favourites out. 'I don't mean anything stupid, like adding odds and evens. It's no argument to say there's more even combinations than odd.'

'I'd never dream of saying it,' said Emery with a heavy irony which Wilf disregarded.

'Eighteen to twelve, yes. That makes thirty in all. The only point of that system'd be if you backed all the evens.'

People were pushing by to the Tote to lay bets for the coming race or collect winnings on the last one. 'Come on,' said Emery.

'No, wait and have a look at the dogs as they pass.'

'Oh-oo, that looks a good one,' said the short girl.

'That he is,' said Wilf, butting in, 'but not to bet on.'

'Where's Bob got to?' she replied after a glance at Wilf as if she thought he might be Bob in a skilful disguise.

'Bobbed off,' said the man who had lifted her up and who refused to be snubbed. 'Bet you a bob.'

'My name's Bett,' she said in astonishment. 'But I was christened Elizabeth. Elizabeth June.'

'There's a dog in the next race called Jerusalem June,' said the man, taking her arm, 'I'll lay a bob on it in your name. A bob for a bet. Come on, bobtail. Bob down, you're spotted.'

'You make me dizzy,' she said, surrendering.

'That's the end of the bobbin,' he replied. 'My name's Tom.'

The dogs were being lifted into the traps at the end. Up came the electric hare, scurrying along the rails. The traps leaped open and out flashed the dogs. The excitement roared higher and higher, but Emery found himself watching the chap who had got off with Bob's girl; he was saying something close to her ear, and she gave a little squeal. Some chaps know how to do it, he thought. It's a knack. To the acclamation of a terrific roar the dog which had been easily leading came home. The spectators cheered.

'Favourite,' Wilf explained.

'Didn't he come from trap three?'

Wilf made some more notes. 'The exception that proves the rule. He must have been superlatively good. In fact, he was.'

The loud-speaker was announcing the names of the first, second, and third dogs. Jerusalem June came in third. Emery was pleased. He

looked round for the couple, Tom and Elizabeth June, but they were gone. 'Now this is the race I've been waiting for,' said Wilf.

'What about number two?' Emery asked. 'Jumping Jehoshaphat.'

'No, no,' said Wilf, 'Oh, no, no. She's a bitch. Hasn't been back long enough to get into form. She's improving, but I wouldn't back her yet. Number four is the dog of my dreams. Belshazzar's Beast.' He peered and gave up. 'So far there's hardly anything on at the Tote. How are the bookies going?'

Emery glanced along at the bookies chalking odds on their boards and read out the figures to Wilf. When the rates were up to 9 to 1, Wilf went on over to the Tote and hadn't come back when the race began. Emery watched with more interest. At the first bend number four was leading. The heads of the spectators swung as one to catch the dogs coming up, and swung again to watch them going past. Second bend. Number four still leading. Wilf had gone to put ten bob on Belshazzar's Beast for Emery as well as himself, and Emery felt that, after all, Wilf did know something about dogs and was a good chap to keep in with. The dogs burst into the straight. Emery shouted with the others and found himself straining on tiptoe with clenched hands. Third bend. The dogs were racing like greased lightning. For a moment everything blurred in Emery's gaze, and then the roar of cheers told him that the race was over.

'Which won?' he asked, but nobody heard or answered. What had happened to Wilf? Was he waiting by the Tote to nip in and get the winnings?

Then the loud-speaker started the announcements. 'First, Jumping Jehoshaphat . . .'

Somebody caught Emery's elbow. He looked round and saw Clayton. 'Glad to find you serious officials can unbend sometimes from your self-appointed job of running and running the country,' said Clayton affably.

Emery hadn't seen him for a couple of weeks. Clayton had declared himself hurt when Emery decided he ought to find his house without anyone else's help. 'I'm not unbending, I find this extremely hard work. So would you if you tried to follow my friend Rose's systems.'

'Where is he? Bring him over and meet my friends.'

'I've lost him. He's probably deep in calculations somewhere, trying to find out why his system let him down.'

Emery hesitated, but let Clayton pilot him away from the rails, towards a heavy-jowled man and two smart-looking women. He expected to find one of them Mrs Clayton, but they both turned out Misses. The man was Edward Nunn, the girls were Sheila Something

and Something Carstairs. Sheila was a pleasant-faced girl, grey-eyed, broad-browed, with a grey fur snugged round her neck. The other girl was thin, dark, dressed in a very tight black dress of some shiny material; she said nothing and didn't even look at Emery when he was introduced.

'If you want any extra coal,' said Clayton, 'just whisper it to Will Emery, and he'll ring up the Cabinet and get it for you.'

Miss Something Carstairs gave Emery a sudden look as if she was going to ask him what coal was, but Sheila smiled and Nunn guffawed.

'We've only just looked in,' said Sheila, with a gurgling laugh 'Jimmy here,' she pointed at Clayton, who bowed, 'thought he had a dead cert—'

'Which turned out certainly dead,' wheezed Nunn, heaving with silent laughter and at last achieving a guffaw when everyone else had stopped smiling. 'Came in last.'

'We've come, seen, and lost,' said Clayton. 'Now we're going on for a few drinks across the way. You, too.'

'I can't see Rose. Perhaps he's taken arsenic on the Tote doorstep. . . Ah, yes, there I see him, by the rail.' He went over, still uncertain 'Do you want to stay, Wilf?'

'I must stay for the one after the next,' said Wilf desperately. 'I can't possibly go wrong on that.'

'Do you mind if I go then? I've met some friends.' As he turned away, he added, 'Put five bob on for me.' He didn't altogether like deserting Wilf.

Nunn was driving the car, and Clayton got in at his side. 'You pack in with the ladies,' he said to Emery, and Emery got in at the back, sitting between the girls on the edge of the seat. 'Did you win anything?' Sheila asked.

'Not a sausage. It's always the same. All I've ever won was a gollywog in a dance-affle.'

'Unlucky gambler, lucky lover.'

A jolt threw him back on the girls. 'You'd better relax,' said Sheila. 'You perforated my ribs with your elbow that time. I'd rather be squeezed to death. . . .'

He leaned back, bowered in their warmth, their scents. They're not cheap tarts, whoever they are, he thought. Sheila was babbling on. 'I just stuck a pin down and got Beeswax Tuesday—I'm talking of the last time I came with Teddy. And what do you think happened? It won. And the odds were colossal, something like ten to one or a thousand to one. Everyone thought I must have had a kennel-up.'

They stopped before an hotel. Inside, the girls went to the Ladies

and Nunn went to ring someone up. Emery had a feeling that Nunn had been ready to show amiability at the Dogs, but had thought Clayton went too far in making him join the party.

They sat in the lounge and Clayton ordered five whiskies. 'Nunn's all right,' he said, leaning over with the flatteringly intimate air that Emery now knew well. 'He's a bit grim-looking, especially when he laughs, but there's no vice in him, and he can be very useful.'

'Not to me.'

'He pulls most of the Rotarian strings and a lot of other matters as well. By the way, you aren't a Mason, are you? Well, you might find it worth while to join. Tell me if you feel like it. In my humble opinion the thing itself is a lot of balderdash, but it pays to be in. Not as much as it did once. All the contracts and so on used to go by Masonic nods and nids. Still, it's essential even now for a chap who really wants to get on. Got to be either a Mason or a Catholic. You're not a Catholic? I thought not. Then join the Masons, my boy.'

'Is that Sheila Nunn's girl?'

'She's having her voice trained, and he pays.'

Nunn came back, rubbing his hands and no longer glowering. He must have had good news on the 'phone. 'Glad to meet you, Emery,' he said, as if they had only just met. 'Clayton's mentioned you several times. Come in and see me some day, if you're passing. You know my offices. Market Street.'

Clayton nodded at Emery, who replied, 'Yes, of course. I pass that way quite often. But I'm generally in a hurry.'

The girls came back, with powdered noses. Nunn patted the chair at his side, and Sheila sank into it. She lifted her whisky, 'Here's wishing.' She glanced at Emery, but he looked away. Nunn leaned over to knock his cigarette ash off in the ash-tray with a brewer's name on it, and took the opportunity to lever himself with one hand on Sheila's knee. He can have her, thought Emery, and decided to go as soon as he'd bought a round. I shouldn't have left old Wilf at the Dogs. And he watched out for a chance to express his contempt. It came when Clayton made some remark about the Watch Committee. Nunn was on it and had attended a meeting earlier that evening.

'What we need is someone to watch the watchers,' he said. 'You remember the tales during the war. If an army convoy had to come through Newcastle, they counted the lorries at the other end to make sure that none of 'em had been sold in the black-market on the way through.'

'A tribute to our spirit of municipal enterprise,' said Clayton, determined not to be upset. He capped Emery's anecdote with others—how one alderman had bought (through agents) supplies of army

blankets from a Pioneer Corps Quartermaster, and sold them at 500 per cent. profit back to the army; how a member of the Watch Committee had got a cheap lease on some condemned buildings for store purposes and then sub-let them out as brothels for the troops; and how a ranting American Colonel had been diddled by one of the Labour Councillors over a deal in scrap-iron.

'It's my round now,' said Emery, keen to get away.

He didn't do much walking nowadays, but he decided to walk home. Jean was away, staying for a few days with a friend who was having a baby in North Shields. And so nobody would ask him questions about coming in late. Not that Jean would have asked anything; at most she'd have made some sarcastic remark. It's bad, he thought. We're falling into quite separate grooves, haven't a word to say to one another. I must make an effort before it's too late. She doesn't do much to help things herself, but if I insisted on a showdown, she'd have to drop her scornful airs and get down to some co-operation. Not that it's all her fault. It's time I gave up thinking I can meet stunkers like Clayton and Nunn anywhere except across a conference table. When all's said and done, I hate their guts; and Jean's getting to think they're my buddies. Well, they're not, and Mister Twister Clayton is going to get the surprise of his life one of these days.

As he walked on through the sleeping streets, he felt as if he were back in the deathly past, the hush of murdered towns and yards. Can I ever forget it? The whole coast littered with the wrecks of hope, the wrecks of what had once been England. Drowned in this dim and chilly mixture of moonlight and street-lighting, slaty-green of mouldering decay. Chimneys of desolation with no banners of smoke trailing across the sky, burnt-out furnaces charred with their own black fires of death, derelict steel mills falling into scrap, coke-ovens with the weeds creeping closer, slag-heaps scurfed with grey-green weeds. Aye, that was your England, Clayton, that was Tory England. To hell with it. Sometimes I may seem to forget, to weaken. But underneath I know what I know.

The 'thirties. The Blast-furnacemen's Union falling from twelve to four thousand. Most of 'em out of work since 1921. Too weak to do a job if the chance did turn up. Years and years and years of death-in-life, men become less than their own shadows. Walking all round the Tyne to find jobs, till the boots went. No breakfast, the sleepless nights dragging on and the flesh twitching, too hungry to sleep, too hungry to think, but not too hungry to suffer. We made the ships of the seven seas, we the proud men of the Tyne. Dominoes in the Workmen's Institute. Billiards for an hour if you could spend the reckless sum of a

penny ha'penny, twopenny whist-drives. Kicking your heels at street corners, dreaming of a pennorth of Woodbines. Oh sweet Christ. After weeks of organisation by that welfare worker with the big adam's-apple, a mouth-organ band. But how could you keep blowing with no spit? Lost trucks and wagons splitting at Palmer's, no hammers jarring the earth of man, and the asphalt turning green, the yards a rubble of old iron, thistles, rotten wood. And faces grey as wood-ash, ready to crumble in a strong wind. Proud men, who gave ships to all the seven seas of the stormy world.

But I fought through. It didn't get me down. Jean, you helped me. Ah, it takes more than all the winds of hell to make you bend or flinch, Jean. All the same, I fought through. And now we're on top of the world. We've still got these tricky devils, the Claytons and the Nunns, sure they can stop the avalanches with a policeman's whistle. Clayton thinks he can fool me, but he can't. If I put up with him, it's because I can use him against all he stands for. They think we chaps are too raw to see through their little games, they think we can't run the country. But we can. We'll use them as long as it suits us, and then out they go. It's this transitional period that's full of pitfalls; that's why we're watching our step. But they won't fool me, and that's that. I'm glad I didn't touch that bitch tonight. None of 'em is going to get anything on me.

Turning up the hull, he was sharply sorry that Jean wasn't at home. He felt sure that in his present mood he could find the words to make her see sense, to bring her round to his way of thinking, to get her at his side again. And he did need her. He was ready to admit that he needed her, her strengthening presence and her shrewd counsel. Ah, Jean girl.

13

London

FOR SOME DAYS the Tremaines lived in fear of the arrival of the police. Jim Cooper and two others were indeed arrested, but they said nothing of Herb, and he began to feel more cock-a-hoop, protesting before his father that he'd behave himself in the future, but bragging to Phyl that he'd escaped while Jim had been nabbed. 'Max says I made a first-rate getaway.'

'Don't you dare go near that Max again, or I'll do something.'

'What'll you do? If you give me away to the narks, Max'll have you done-in one dark night.' He came close and whispered, 'Max says

he'd like a talk with you some time. Aw, you don't know what you're missing.'

Such conversations infuriated her so much that she couldn't speak. She made a swipe at Herb, which he easily dodged. All the same, he wasn't feeling as reckless as he pretended. He followed the proceedings against Jim and the others with an awed interest, and he went regularly to school, which was a great relief for his mother.

Phyl went on looking for a job. She could have got into a dress-making workshop, but she wanted to keep out of that sort of place if possible. Nell had worked in one for a while before her marriage, and she'd had harrowing tales about the heat of the rooms and the hard driving; and the firm whose advertisement Phyl answered had its workshops at basement-level, with dirty fanlights that had never been open, and a large fire for heating irons that added its sweltering fumes to the stink of sweat, scorched cloth, sour earth, while the electric light, glaring and yet inadequate, gave all the workers a deep frown of headaches.

She made the round of the neighbourhood to see if any shopkeeper wanted an assistant, but nothing turned up. I'll have to find a job in a factory farther away, she thought. But she didn't want to do that while her mother was still unwell, hobbling about and losing something of her old courage under the heavy gloom of Tremaine's presence.

One evening as she was going home, she met Dave Whitby, once Kath's friend, and stopped to chat. Two boys were betting one another that they wouldn't walk along the top of the wall with a drop of some twenty feet on the farther side (into what had been an improvised water-tank during the war). And three pairs of young folk were strolling by, pushing one another into the gutter and trying to remember a song that began 'At a dime a time.' One of the girls fancied herself as a yodeller, and a boy, not of the party, was kicking a tin can down the roadway. Such noises, however, did not upset Dave, who leaned on his lamp-post and suggested that Phyl should go to a dance the next night—at a special place of his in Soho. And she was feeling so much out of sorts that she agreed.

So she turned up at the lamp-post next evening and they went by Tube to Leicester Square; and after looking at the cinema posters went up past Lisle Street with its prowling or doorway-stationed women (whom Phyl noticed for the first time). 'Here we are in the Worst End,' said Dave, with a lavish gesture bestowing on her the West End and all its luxuries—though the latter turned out to be chop-and-chips and ice-cream in a small café next to the poolroom that was next to the underground dance-club.

She tried politely to show interest in Dave's conversation about the

shirt-shop where he worked, a shop with a name all its own but in fact owned by a ring which bought up small businesses and kept the names over the doors. The manager at Dave's shop was a New York American, and everything in the window was ticketed: *Genuine American Style*, *Go Gay with Broadway*, or *The Latest in Los Angeles*. For a while Phyl couldn't make out what Dave was hinting at, but she realised that he was telling her about the manager's love-life. The hundred-per-cent ball-bearing American was One-of-Those, and lived with one of the assistants. Dave mimicked the latter's ladylike tones and described him as a Cluckin'. Indeed, Dave was so proud of his mincing imitation that Phyl looked round to see if the other diners were listening and thinking he spoke with his real accent. And she was puzzled as to his attitude. Obviously he felt masculinely superior to the lisper, but otherwise he seemed to admire the shop and its contents.

'Do they have shops of ties and things in America with notices saying they're what people wear in England?' she asked.

Dave was taken aback. 'I don't see how they could,' he said. The only styles he could think of were American. English clothes were just clothes, American clothes were style. Except of course for greasy top-hats and things like that, he said after some hard thought, and there weren't clothes in any ordinary sense.

Phyl studied his get-up, and for the first time asked herself if she liked those striped flannels, that belted jacket 'house-coat style,' the wide-brim U.S.A. trilby on the hat-rack—and the long sideboards by his ears. No, she didn't like them much. Nor that tie with silver spider-webs and a nude girl caught in them. And yet she'd always thought of Dave as very well-dressed. That had been Kath's influence.

They went down into the Krazy Klub, and after they'd been let in and Dave had written her name in a big book, they went on into the dance-room. 'Nobody here yet,' he said to explain the fact that the floor was empty and that on the dais, under the canopy of shiny green stuff, there was only a slightly battered piano and a man doing some thing to a double bass. The bar had notices: *Hot Dogs and Poison Coca-Cola for the Carocoler*, and other such mystifying phrases. Various people were lounging about the walls or sitting in the seats. A small furry-headed man, with a vast coat broad at the shoulders and tight at the knees, leaned against a pillar painted with red cats and talked to a tall gangly fellow with pointed beard and short overcoat, while a girl with cropped hair and yellow jumper was pulling up her very blue skirt of purple to adjust her suspenders. Another furry-headed man in a large check-suit (also of the zoot-suit type) was listening to a willow-girl in a green slut skirt and a sort of puce smock.

Phyl didn't feel at home, but she let Dave pilot her to one of the

tables at the side behind the pillars painted with yellow devils. On the walls were scarlet women, very thin and naked, drinking or dancing in ingenious attitudes. Dave went over to the bar and bought two glasses of red wine. 'It's Algerian,' he said as he carefully put the glasses down, 'but it's good stuff. They smuggle it in in one of the orange boats.' Phyl recognised by the tone of his voice that all these remarks about the wine were being quoted from someone else; and she was so proud of her penetration that she gave Dave a really radiant smile. 'I'm growing up,' she told herself. A month ago I'd have thought he thought all that up for himself. He went on in a hushed voice, 'There's coke sold here, too, if you know how to give the ticktack.'

'Do they know?' she asked, indicating the trio round the cat-pillar. 'They're honest-to-god jitterbuggers. The skirt is French by injection'—he glossed the phrase for her incomprehension—'she lives with a Frenchie, a flute-player.'

'And that girl in the overall thing.'

'I heard her one night saying she's an art student and she never paints anything but ears.' But he dropped the subject of the ear artist, pointing excitedly to two more musicians who had just come in. 'There's Wally Marks. I know him. It was him put my name down. I'll introduce you.'

He hurried over, and Phyl noticed that his shoes squeaked. He returned with a slick-looking man who wore his dark hair in long locks and who kissed Phyl's hand. 'Your first time in this sink? Don't let it be your last. No need to wait for Dave to ask you. Any night after nine, knock and demand Wally M. Come on, drink up and have one on me.' He went off to the bar with their glasses.

'He's terrific,' said Dave. 'You haven't heard boogie-woogie till you've heard him. He buys his shirts from us, and he doesn't care what they cost as long as they're smashing.'

Wally M. came back with three glasses. 'Lots more where this came from.' He drew up a chair and stared at Phyl. 'You know, you could make something of yourself. But then, so could I. Here I get paid with spit, but I enjoy life. That's the great thing, eh brother smut?' he asked the delighted Dave, then turned back to Phyl. 'You've got too many stars in your eyes, baby. That's right, hold your head high, but come down to earth now and then.' He chattered on, holding Phyl's hand. She felt foolish and glanced at Dave, who, however, seemed to feel highly flattered that the great Wally M. approved of his girl. 'Let's have another.' He asked Dave to go and fetch the drinks, 'Tell them to chalk them up to me. Your turn? Nonsense. This is my lucky night. And don't think I use money. I do it all by charm.'

Phyl didn't want the wine, but it was easier to sip the stuff and half-

listen to Wally's babble—except that he disconcerted her by holding her hand or by pressing her arm or leg. Not secretly, but with what seemed an innocent display of interest. And Dave went on smiling, as if he took Wally's attentions as a tribute to himself. Then they looked up to find the place quite thronged with young people, who were more or less replicas of Dave or of the cat-pillar trio, or were amiable negroes; and Wally hastened to buy one more round and then joined the other musicians in time to crash into the first number.

Certainly he knew his job and so did the others. After the first loud notes they began slowly, in a sort of melancholy undertone, and only a few couples gyrated on the floor in as slow and melancholy a mood. But soon the music warmed up and things began to happen. The dance space was about fifteen by thirty yards, and it was soon lively with two score or so of dancers—eight couples jitterbugging, the others moving in a quickstep. The best jitterbuggers were the negroes, some of whom were in Air Force uniform, they never lost a chance to jive, now and then letting out a yell. About thirty unpartnered males lounged round the walls, with their hands in their pockets, watching the dancers, sometimes exchanging comments, all (except the art eccentrics) dressed in flannels and sports coats.

'I just want to watch,' Phyl told Dave. 'For a while, anyway.' She felt fine and everything looked wonderful, but she wasn't sure how far she could trust her legs.

A slow waltz swooned along and the lights dimmed, and Phyl felt herself turning, turning in a world as rich and lovely as a great red rose. If only she could stay there for ever, at the heart of the music. Why didn't I come before? She felt grateful to Dave and let him fondle her hand while the lights were dim—indeed, the lights almost went out, did go out, she was sure. Somebody giggled.

Then the lights came back—very slowly, so as not to embarrass anyone. The men left their partners on the floor, unless they were with girls they'd brought. 'Why are all the girls wearing red?' asked Phyl, and Dave started counting to see how many red girls there were. Almost all wore skirts with jumpers or blouses. Phyl herself had on a pale blue jumper knitted by her mother, and a maroon skirt. The youngest girls, she noticed, were asking the negroes for dances, and you couldn't blame them. It must be terribly exciting to jive with such good dancers. The negroes enjoyed it all so much, and everyone else looked miserable, with set faces. How stuffy it was, though a large fan was spinning on the ceiling. Two lads, who were going the round of the girls, staring in their faces, passed by and stared at her. She stared back, and then burst into laughter.

'What is it?' Dave asked.

She'd have told him if she knew. Some spivs in coats with Yankee-type collars and large knotted ties, with house-coat jackets of light fawn and brown flannels, with Boston slash-back haircuts, went slowly past, and nudged one another, commenting on her in thick voices. How martyred the girls looked when they danced with a partner they didn't like: as if they were trying not to sneeze, she thought. And it was all infinitely amusing. In most of the halls where she'd danced there'd been notices: *No jitterbugging here*. And never had she seen such enthusiastic jiving. The yellow-jumper girl had to be seen to be believed, with her twirls and wriggles and kicks. She must have double or treble joints. It was hard to credit the human body with such contortionist elasticity without flying apart in odd bits.

'Come on,' said Dave, pulling her up by her two hands. And she found herself on the dance floor without her legs giving way. Perhaps because it had all happened so suddenly. She liked the dance, and felt more at home when she resumed her seat. Some of the girls, lacking partners, were dancing together, if you could call it dancing—trucking round the edge of the floor with hands clasped behind each other's back, and sometimes getting their feet mixed up. One such couple would have fallen, but a negro caught them and danced with the taller girl, who had red stockings on. Some medical students came in (Dave told her what they were) and more spivs with padded-shoulder zoot-suits and attached-collar shirts. Half a dozen lads stood near the entry of the room and never came any farther in. Fancy being so shy, thought Phyl. Wally at the piano caught her eye. Oh, to go on for ever with the piano notes subtly thumping against her nudriff and the bass dolorously carrying her down the stream of tears and the saxophone lusciously tickling.

The dance-band leader announced that now anyone could come up and sing. At first no one responded, then a negro gave a bellow of laughter and ran on to the dais. The music began and the lights went out. Phyl danced again. A spotlight of changing colours picked out the singer at the mike. The dancers went slowly round, shuffling their feet, and Dave kissed Phyl on the cheek, she had managed to turn her mouth away.

Others sang. Suddenly everything went very quickly. Wally was sitting opposite her again, and she kept on saying 'Shucks' to everything—a word she had never used before, but which at the moment seemed extremely witty and in key with the whole jive-atmosphere. 'How did you like *Three Little Words*—fine old pop, isn't it?' Then he began talking about nerve-beats (pressing her arm) and Louis Armstrong. 'Some say he lags behind the beat and then catches up. Think again, baby. Once you get behind, you'll never catch up, no matter

how you try. What really happens is that Louis syncopates the lead. . . . Now I hold that beat and rhythm are quite different, see? When an artist improvises, the accents and values are left to the performer's discretion. Gee, you make me feel mad. That's why, when the thing's printed, we're all mixed up together, the fine points of rhythm get left out. Someday I'm going to tell you something, sweetheart.'

Then she was dancing with him, while someone substituted at the piano. She was feeling more and more vague about events, but she suddenly realised he was trying to persuade her to give Dave the slip and go home with him. She pretended not to understand, and got back to her chair as soon as she could. Dave was dancing with the puce-smocked girl, doing some sort of trick-stuff she seemed sitting on his back one moment, then standing on her head with her ankles crossed behind the nape of his neck. Phyl rubbed her eyes 'All you need is to let yourself go and trust me,' Wally was saying 'You'd be surprised.'

She was relieved when he went off to buy more drinks and Dave came back. 'I want to go,' she said, and though he grumbled, they went. Someone was singing *O Sweet Mystery of Life* from the dais, and the shuffling dancers were joining in.

The cool night air restored her wits for a moment, but in the Tube she felt drowsy and her temples were knocking. Luckily Dave must have been feeling somewhat the same, for he didn't say anything. They changed Tubes without mishap, but time was beginning to seem indefinitely long, and she felt that she'd go to sleep any moment and never wake up again. When they emerged from the Tube station and began the walk home, she felt revived again, but the effect soon began wearing out. What a fool, she thought. And one of her shoes had started pinching. Bed, lovely bed, any sort of bed. Dave still didn't say anything. He was walking doggedly along, holding her arm. I'd like to tell him about that Wally of his, she thought.

And then suddenly, as they came down the street towards her home, her mind cleared. She realised what Dave's doggedness meant. He'd try to lead her up the lane where the old packing-cases were stacked; and so she was ready when he tried to make the turn abruptly and pull her in. She wrenched her arm loose 'No, Dave, no. . . .' She held up her face to be kissed. She didn't want to kiss him, but she felt that she had to make that routine return for a night out which had cost him quite a lot. In the doorway of home he could have kissed her for quite a while and she'd have taken it. But now he tried to turn the kiss into a tactical move with the packing-cases as its obvious goal. Again she resisted. Right inside she felt dead sober. Nobody's going to get me this way.

She tore herself free. 'Thanks, Dave. . . .' And ran for the safety of her home doorway.

She felt perfectly sober because of the clarity of mind with which she had understood and defeated Dave's system; and she stayed sober all the way up the stairs and through the darkness of the Banting room. There was a faint light under the Tremaine door. She paused with her hand on the door-handle, then opened the door quietly. Inside, she saw her father lying on his back in the bed, slightly snoring, and Herb stretched across the bed's foot. But her mother was sitting at the table, with a candle before her.

She leaned back against the door, suddenly unable to move. She was afraid and wanted to laugh, and she was sorry for her mother, terribly sorry. What could she say in reassurance? What could she ever say? That's the last time I go to one of those places, she thought. Mother, can't you see I'm all right? Nothing's happened. Nothing like that is going to happen to me. But she saw the growing dismay in her mother's eyes, and knew that the worst was suspected. Oh, what can I say? What can I say? I love her so much, and she's so sick, and everybody gives her such a bad time, father and Herb and me. Poor mother. Poor mother. I'd do anything for her, and I only make things worse.

'Phyl,' she heard her mother sob. 'Oh, Phyl.'

She lifted her hand, to reach out to her mother, to ward her off, and tried once again to speak, to find the simple word of love and reassurance that would put everything to rights—that would make her mother understand and would give the family a new start of concord and trust. But she couldn't find the word, and if she had found it, she couldn't have said it. With a moan she slid to the floor.

★

It was time she had another talk with Bette. Once or twice she sat at the window—the only way she could escape the various happenings in the room—and tried to summon up as clearly as possible the memory of the March to Hyde Park. It was all beautiful and remote and unrelated to her problems, becoming more and more like a technicolor film seen last week and decomposed into a vague warmth of meaningless but exciting patterns. I must get hold of Bette, she thought. I haven't got brains like her, that's what's wrong.

She managed to get along one afternoon, and inquired at the back of the hotel. The man who was sweeping a drain out merely shook his head at her questions; and she was going off when she saw a girl in the passage, whom she was sure had been near her on the march. You couldn't mistake the odd way she wore her hair forward in a sort of pad over her brow.

'I don't suppose you know me,' said Phyl, 'but I'm a friend of Bette Jones.'

'Oh, she's gone,' the girl replied. 'Well and truly gone.' And she replied to Phyl's dismayed questions, 'They'd blacklisted her, that's what it was. All the same, she made it easy for 'em.'

'What happened?' Phyl pictured all sorts of frame-ups and false accusations according to her memory of Hollywood films. 'Is she in jail?'

'No, no,' said the girl, trying to get something out from between her two front teeth. 'The head waiter gave her a lot of contradictory orders till he got her rattled, and when she answered him back at last, he said she was insolent before witnesses, and one thing led to another. I dare say she did tell him a few home-truths, and it's a fact we still get the same brand of sausages tasting of varnish. So out she went. It's a shame, and we're trying to get the Union to take it up.'

'I thought they promised no victimisation.'

'They did, and sausages with some meat in 'em.'

'I'm sorry. If she looks in, will you tell her I called? My name's Phyl Tremaine.'

'Okay, but I can hardly remember my own name sometimes now. I keep on hoping I'm somewhere else, I suppose.' She sniffed as Phyl turned away. 'All the same, she should have watched her step. They knew she was one of the strike committee.'

Phyl went back home and found her mother alone, wondering whether a shirt would still be long enough to wear if she cut another strip off the end to make into a collar. 'Look how frayed it is,' she said, showing the existing collar. 'You'd think a horse had been chewing it.' Then she remembered and began again on the unfortunate night of Phyl's visit to the dance club. 'I don't know how you can have the face to sit there with your hands in your lap after coming home in such a disgraceful state.'

'Oh, mother, don't start on that,' Phyl pleaded. 'I've told you all about it. I won't ever do it again. I won't, I won't, I won't.'

Mrs Tremaine was partly disarmed by Phyl's fierce tones of renunciation. 'All right, but don't forget.'

She began weeping silently. 'If you'd only seen the things I've seen, and what your poor grandmother had to bear with after we lost the shop. My poor brother Will had to live with his uncle, a roaring drunken loon he was. Oh, there's bad blood as well as good in the family, though never breathe a word of it to your father, or he'll blame Herb on my side of the marriage-bed. And that'd be unfair and untrue, for once when he was in a melancholy mood he told me how his Uncle Jeremy killed his wife with a hatchet through disagreement

room, her own room, not a dull cubicle, and could take her time. She sang as she prepared Matt's supper.

Only one thing worried her at moments. If she'd have to be married to attain such freedom, whom was she going to marry? Was there something wrong with her, something that made her unlike other girls? She certainly didn't feel for lads like Dave and Roy as Kath and Pearl did. It must be I'm cold, she told herself—remembering someone's complaints in a film. It was no use getting married, if you were cold: all the films and novelettes agreed about that. But sometimes the cold woman became a happy bride in the end. She tried to remember how it happened, but was vague.

Matt came home, wolfed down his supper, and went off to the local. About half an hour after closing time he rolled in, slightly drunk, and talked to her over a cup of strong tea, telling her about past struggles in the Royal Docks, about the hopes and fears the men felt over the new Scheme that was being worked out. 'No matter how good it is on paper, the bosses will try to wangle it all their own way. That's when the tug-of-war begins.' He liked talking of the docks, of their strong tradition of solidarity. 'Oh, Phyl, if it was the dockers who decided, there'd be socialism tomorrow in Britain.' Then he went on with stories about bombing and fires during the war . . . until at last he yawned, gave her a good-night kiss, and said something teasing with a grin. 'Looks as if it's going to be chilly in the small hours. Don't be surprised if you find me getting into the big bed for a spot of warmth.'

But as soon as he stretched out, he went straight to sleep and didn't wake till she brought him his morning cup.

She visited Nell daily at the hospital, and told her all about the baby and got her instructions about the way Matt liked things done. Nell was sure that the cooking had to be done as she did it, or Matt wouldn't eat his meals; but Phyl was sure that Matt was too hungry to notice. She disobeyed Nell's instructions a few times and Matt never complained.

'Don't treat him too well,' Nell told her, 'or he'll be so spoiled I'll never live up to it when I'm back.'

In the bus Phyl remembered the words. So Nell was feeling a bit jealous. Not that there was the least need for any jealousy, but Phyl felt pleased and flattered. As if it was a proof there was no inherent impossibility in her getting married herself one day. She looked up to see that the conductor was waiting for her money.

'Woken up at last?' he said, a young bronzed chap with a crinkled nose. 'You were having such a happy dream, I didn't like to disturb you.'

Kath had clearly been dodging her, but they came face to face one afternoon. Kath had tried to slip across the street, but the traffic foiled her and she made the best of a bad job by an effusive welcome. 'Whatever's happened to you? I haven't seen you anywhere. But, then, I've been so busy. You know that Mr Grivens. He's having me taught manicuring. I left the hotel years ago. You know how it is, some people just hate it when you try to better yourself. They want to drag you down to their own level. Besides, Mr Grivens had worked it all out before the silly old strike started. He said I mustn't spoil my hands and feet. Funny, isn't it. You expect a man to look at your face, and we all know some of 'em can't keep their eyes from going a bit lower down, but that is the first time I've heard so much about hands and feet. Men are really funny, the more you get to know 'em. I'll tell you all about it some day. This is too public. And the best thing is that he's got the pull, he can find me a manicurist's job when I do know my stuff.'

Phyl had meant to tell Kath off very severely, but now they had met, she listened and said yes and no. For one thing, she didn't want a row in the street. If Kath once got worked up, she'd raise her voice and forget all her pretences. Once she pushed Pearl into the gutter, almost under a passing car. That's the kind of temper she had when she let go. And besides, Phyl told herself, she wasn't really interested whether Kath was a cheat or not. All this showing-off about hands and feet, she wasn't even curious. Still, she glanced at Kath's long hands, which had obviously had much cream rubbed into them of late, and the fur-lined booties on her feet. All right, she had hands and feet. Let her make the best of them.

The only effect of the meeting was to make her think again about Bette; and as she was undressing that night, she had a brilliant idea. Why not write to Harry Manson at the L S E? She could find the address in the 'phone-book in a call-box.

So next morning she wrote a note:

Dear Harry, I don't suppose you'll remember me, but I met you with Bette, and now I don't know where she lives. She wrote me a card, but it had been in the rain or something, and I thought you might know where she is. If you see her, will you tell her all this? I am sorry for troubling you, but it means a lot to me, yours truly, Phyl Tremaine.

Then, worried that he might think Phyl was a man's name, she changed it to Phyllis and made a blot. So she wrote *Phyl* again and under it *Phyllis excuse the blot, please tell her I'm at a different place too. Then she found the address in a 'phone-book and remembered to write private*—though after she'd written it, she was uncertain and wondered if a

master or somebody would open it. She wasn't at all sure what the L.S.E. was; it had the word School in it. And so, before she posted the letter, she went over all she had written to see if it might get Harry into trouble if someone else opened it. And at last, with qualms, she slipped the envelope into the box.

It must have reached Harry later the same day; for to her surprise there was a letter from Bette next morning. She hadn't expected so quick a reply, and felt flustered. She was glad that she was at Nell's place, without her mother to notice and say, 'Who's that from? Up to your old tricks again, after all you promised.' How could she explain to her mother that Bette was quite different from Kath and the others? Alone in the bedroom, except for the gurgling baby, she read what Bette had written.

Dear Phyl, I was ever so glad to hear from you. I was really upset when you didn't either write or turn up. I don't suppose you know that I was turfed out as soon as the excitement quieted down. Harry says that's one of the ways they have. They know that after a big strike nobody wants to start all over again. Could you come along tonight or tomorrow night or the night after? I'll be at home every one of them—tell you when we meet. I'm sure you'll be able to manage one or other, so come along any time after seven. I've such a lot to tell you. Harry says that that's how things happen. We seem to be dead as doornails for years, then in a couple of weeks we grow yards and yards, but it's really the sudden effect of what's been accumulating underneath, if you understand me. Yours sincerely Bette.

P.S. I've just read that bit about yards again. Don't worry, I haven't shot up as much as all that, or I'd crack my head on the ceiling.

Phyl was deeply excited, and read the letter through twice before she could get at grips with it; and though she liked Harry, she wasn't altogether pleased with his prominence in Bette's thought.

If only Matt comes home early, she thought fervently. But her hopes fell through. He was on overtime again, and she was fidgety and upset by the time he arrived back, more tired than usual, and a bit snappish. He didn't even go to the local, but brought out a bottle of Guinness he had in the cupboard with the gas meter. And only after he had eaten and lain back in his arm-chair and drunk a glassful, did he begin to be his cheerful self again.

'I meant to see Nell at the hospital this evening,' he said. 'But the job was longer than we expected. Three of our chaps were sick and Bill Lever lost his wife—she went off with the lodger, and he didn't

turn up either. If this ain't Grave Family Trouble, he says, the Port Manager can take a running jump at himself.' He laughed and poured out Phyl half a glass, disregarding her protest. 'Ah, well, it's a queer world, but it makes you laugh. If only Nell was here, we could have a first-class party, just the three of us. I always liked you, Phyl, but I never knew what a damn fine girl you are . . .'

Phyl was pleased to hear his praises, but all the same she wanted him to stop. 'The baby's crying,' she said, and went out, though she hadn't heard anything, and in fact the baby was slumbering, at peace with the world and his own stomach. Then she went back and sipped her stout while Matt rambled on about Bill Lever's lodger, a railway porter. 'Unless he gets transferred quick, there'll be an accident at Liverpool Street. But he was a calm sort of fellow. I suppose he arranged the transfer before he ran off with Bill's missus. They ought to have special forms for that. Application for Transfer owing to Falling for Somebody else's Missus. Oh well, we all laugh at the other fellow with a fly in his eye, but it isn't so funny when we get it ourselves. We ought to be ashamed of ourselves for laughing, Phyl.'

'I'm not laughing. I'm sorry for Bill Lever—though I don't know him. And I'm sorry for his wife too. I don't suppose she'd have run off if she was happy.'

'Well, since you're so charitable, Phyl, you might as well be sorry for the lodger, too. Bill's missus had a bulldog sort of jaw.'

By dint of listening patiently, Phyl learned that Matt would finish on his boat by early afternoon at latest, and as it had been a difficult job, with overtime, he'd then come home and probably have the next day off, too. 'Can I go and see a friend of mine who's living near King's Cross? Mrs Widley'll come up and look after the baby. She said she wouldn't mind. She's working a scarf in garter stitch for her son on a cargo-ship. He's due back Saturday and she wants to finish the scarf as a surprise.'

'You've got it all taped,' said Matt, filling his pipe. 'Why ask me?'

'But you don't really mind?'

'I'll tell you what. You go and buy me another Guinness from the bottle department, and you can have your day off tomorrow.'

So Phyl got there almost on the tick of seven, even though she took half an hour to find Bette's place in an obscure mews near Theobald's Road. All the way she kept on thinking how she'd broach the proposal that she and Bette should take a room together. What heartened her most was the news she'd had that morning from her mother that Tremaine had at last found another job—out at Carpenders Park on the new estate. Now things would be easier at home, and she couldn't

be accused of heartlessness if she went to stay with Bette. I'll manage to give mother a few shillings, she thought, even if I have to scrape and save. . . . She knew her father would protest furiously; but she wasn't so sure how her mother would take the idea—whether she'd see it as a cruel blow to the family bond or whether she'd say, 'The girl's right, you can't call this place a home. Let her strike out on her own.'

At last she found the place. The mews was unlighted and had no numbers—at least, a careful search discovered only one number chalked on a doorway—6. Bette's place was 10—that might mean the fourth or the second on the left, or the fourth or the second on the right. At last she saw a light on the first story of the second on the left, over a decrepit-looking stable with the notice: UNIVERSAL ENGINEERS LTD, *Makers of Ladies' Hairpins*, and she screwed up her courage. Nobody answered, and she knocked again, ready to run. Suddenly there was a crash and the door opened. It was Harry.

'Oh, I'm so glad,' she said, startled. 'I just guessed.'

'Come in, come in,' he said in his best bustling manner. 'What's this about guessing? Dammit, the card has fallen down again.' He bent and picked up a card, which he beat back on the door with his fist, and then hustled Phyl up the steepest and narrowest stairs she had ever climbed. 'Don't mind if you trip. I'm behind to break your fall.'

She went carefully up. The stairs creaked the loudest of any stairs she'd known. 'Aren't they dangerous?'

'Of course, my dear. The place was condemned about fifty years ago, and since then it's been shaken by the flying-bomb at the other end of the mews. But we're lucky to get it.'

It wasn't till Phyl reached the top and turned into the small front room, through a curtain of sacking fringed with red velvet, that she realised the full import of the first person plural in his remarks. There was something unmistakably domestic about the place, even though most of the furniture was made of packing-cases; and at once all her cherished plans of getting together with Bette faded out. Bette was in a kimono, with her hair loose over her shoulders.

'Oh, how pleased I am to see you,' she said with a hug. 'I've just washed my hair. Simply couldn't wait any longer. It was matted.'

'Miami,' said Harry with miaowing noise, and sniffed. 'Nonsense, Bette my beloved. You just do it out of sheer sensuality. Myself, I like the smell of unwashed hair.'

Phyl was sure they must have got married; and though she couldn't blame Bette for not inviting her to the wedding if it had happened during the period of their separation, still she felt hurt that no reference was made to the event. Bette might at least have kept her a piece of the cake in a match-box. But instead of talking about important things

like that, she was explaining how her postcard had become illegible. 'Harry carried it round in his hand and let the rain blow all over it; then he posted it without looking to see what damage he'd caused. Isn't he awful?' she added, beaming at Harry with such obvious pride and admiration that Phyl felt sure they must be married.

'Oh, it's all right now,' she said confusedly. 'I thought at first you'd cried all over it, and that worried me. . . . I hope Harry didn't mind me writing to him.'

'What could you have done better?' he cried, and, taking her hands, pulled her up from her seat. 'That's the collapsible chair, young woman. It's held together with a piece of wire and some liquid wood. If you were less fairylike in the bottom, you'd have crashed it. But I'd feel happier if you sat on the divan. Hard as hell, isn't it?' Army mattresses bought from a scoundrel who was selling everything from watches looted in Germany to A.T.S. underclothes. 'What do you think of our place?'

'It's very quiet, isn't it?' said Phyl.

'Quiet!' He roared with laughter. 'Did you hear that, Bette? Quiet! Why, from crack of dawn the whole mews is one racket of drills and hammers and belts. This is the spot to which all the light industry of England moved from Birmingham. We make hairpins, electric lampshades, ash-trays, and unspillable ink-bottles. And, above all, we make a lot of noise.'

'All the same,' said Phyl, congratulating herself on the subtlety with which she introduced the subject, 'there aren't many people nowadays that can get a place as soon as they've married.'

Bette merely stared at her, but Harry exploded in laughter. 'No, no, Phyl my hearty, you're getting ahead of yourself. If we'd got married and then looked round, we'd be stumped like the others. Instead we jumped into this place as soon as Clive moved out, and so we're blest without marriage lines.'

Bette was smiling now as well as Harry, and Phyl felt unutterably foolish. She hated them both at that moment for having caught her like that. They looked down on her just as Kath and Pearl did, thinking she was a stupid innocent, a fool who'd never grow up and know the world for what it was. 'I didn't mean it like that,' she faltered. 'I was just talking. . . .'

Bette looked up at Harry and held out her hand. 'Help me up. This box is so low. . . .' There was a warm light of happiness on her face; and on his too, as he leaned over and pulled her up. They love one another, thought Phyl, and that excuses anything. She'd read that in most of the novelettes she bought, and it was always being said on the films, so it must be true. But she was still somehow shocked. Most of

her girl friends thought nothing of going with the chaps they had a crush on, and she had always taken that for granted as correct behaviour, however much it went against the things you were told. It was only girls like Iris Cooper who stepped outside the pale, but they were the exceptions. Kath and Pearl were the more ordinary type of good-looking girl who was keen on boys. And though they'd give themselves to the boy of the moment, they'd never have gone and lived with somebody without getting married—right in the face of the affronted world. True, older people sometimes did live together without a wedding, when one of them was married already, and so on. Nobody bothered much about that. But it was different for young people to start off as Bette and Harry had, and it shocked Phyl.

However, when Bette went out into the tiny matchboard kitchen, Phyl squeezed in with her, and the two girls chatted in hurried whispers. Bette explained what had happened. How a couple of days after her dismissal somebody stole the two pounds ten that she'd been keeping as a reserve, probably the landlady in the Paddington house where she was staying. 'She was soaked in gin. I shouldn't have gone there, but it was cheap and I'd been tramping round with my case. . . . I told Harry and he took me along to his room. He was stony himself, and we couldn't find anyone to borrow from. We went to all the pubs, but there wasn't a soul. . . . He acted the gentleman, Phyl, and slept in the arm-chair. But his landlady threw us out next morning. Then he remembered his friend Clive, who was moving out of here. So we settled in. Oh, Phyl, it was dreadful for a week. There was Clive, a big clumsy sort of fellow, and his wife Diotima who was eight months gone, a weepy sort of woman—they were going off to her aunt's place in Lincoln to have the baby; that's why they left. You can't imagine how crowded we were. We even had an awful man called Caraway, who was drunk all the time. But Clive was so good-natured he couldn't throw anyone out. That's how we got him down! Anyway we won, and Caraway had to go. He almost battered the door down, but luckily it was in the daytime, when there's so much noise all round. Harry threw a bucket of water over him in the end, and at last we had the place to ourselves. And Phyl, honest, nothing had happened between us all that while.' She made the gesture of cutting her throat as the penalty for lying.

Phyl was feeling different now. She was all on Bette's side, and she loved Bette more than ever. She kept turning over the scrambled egg-powder in the small saucepan and saying, 'Yes . . . yes. . . .'

'Well, as I was saying, at last we were alone. And I did feel shy, Phyl. We both sat reading. We just had two half-pints at the corner pub, and then we read, and I went into the little box-room behind

there, where I'd undressed on the other nights, and then I came out in my wrap. He'd got the bed ready on the divan. I got in, and he just went on reading. Didn't take his eyes off the book. So I said to him at last: Are you going to read all night, Harry? And all he did was to get up and say that he'd go into the kitchen. I felt hurt, and sort of sorry for him—sorry for myself, too. I was even sorry that Clive and Diotima and Caraway had gone. Don't be stupid, I said, but he just got up and went into the kitchen—in here,' she said, looking round wide-eyed as if only now realising the full enormity of his action.

'Yes,' said Phyl, scraping with a knife at the bottom of the saucepan. 'What happened then?'

'Of course I got up and came after him. And so we had a long argument in here, both standing up and leaning against the wall. Oh, I did get tired. He got more stupid every moment. At last he said that he didn't want me sacrificing myself or just being grateful or something like that. There were tears in his eyes, but I pretended I didn't see them. It only just dawned on me then how shy and uncertain he was. You know, you'd think he was the exact opposite, but you can't tell anybody by what they seem.'

'What did you do then?'

Bette whispered 'It sounds awful, but I was so infuriated I almost got dressed and went out. I've spent the night in a railway station before this. Then I wanted to laugh. But I knew he'd never forgive me. I went back to the front room and I bit my nails. I'm terrible for that when I'm worried. Then I made up my mind.'

'Yes.'

'I took my pyjamas off and I gave a scream.'

'Yes.'

'So he came rushing in and asked what was wrong, and I said there was a rat under the bed.' Bette added in self-defence, 'There are lots of rats in the building, you know.'

'Yes,' said Phyl, wanting the story to go on for ever.

'That was the end,' said Bette casually. 'He stopped being stupid, and now we're as happy as anything.'

Phyl felt rather cheated in this sudden conclusion of the story, but she curbed her curiosity for the moment. 'I hope you didn't mind what I said.' Now that she knew the facts, or at least some of them, she felt quite differently about Harry and Bette. They were obviously doing the right thing, and she'd defend them, whatever anyone said.

'What?' asked Bette, frowning. 'Oh that? No, of course not. I was ever so pleased you thought we looked like a married couple. But apart from anything else, Harry wouldn't get married without his parents agreeing. Or perhaps he would after a while, but not without

trying hard to get their blessing. Funny, isn't it? He doesn't go to the synagogue or anything like that, but he's still ever so frightened of his father. No, not frightened. It's a kind of respect. He goes home to Golders Green on their feast-days or whatever they call 'em, though he doesn't believe in the religion any longer. It just shows how complicated things are when you really get inside 'em.'

'Yes, that's true,' said Phyl slowly, as if for the first time realising a great truth. 'But I do think it's wonderful, Bette. I can't tell you how pleased I am.' She wanted to cry, she felt so happy for Bette's sake, and because everything was right and good again.

★

The Tremaines had a quiet Christmas because of Nell. She was back home; but she still felt run-down and listless, and so Phyl stayed on, doing the housework. She slept with Nell, and Matt was still banished to the sofa. It's better than going home, she thought, even though it isn't so quiet and cosy as when she was on her own with Matt. The Christmas dinner was eaten at Nell's place, as she had better cooking facilities than her mother. Tremaine, once more at work, was less depressed than he'd been for months, though he still shook his head over the way he'd been cheated out of the winnings in the bet he didn't lay. All his anger was now concentrated on the foreman who prowled round with a watch and wanted to know why the same job took five hours one day and seven the next. Matt was in a good temper; he was glad to have Nell home again, and he'd managed to win an appeal against disciplinary action taken by the Port Manager some weeks back. The only untoward accident occurred when Herb managed to get hold of a bottle of Pale Ale and drink it in the lavatory; his hair at once got tousled and tufted, and he came in with a broken bicycle pump, which he declared was a machine-gun. Everyone, he said, had been shot, so they ought to lie down on the floor. Mrs Tremaine clouted him on the ear, and he got under the table, where he clung to the legs and bit Matt in the hand. Serious now, he swore that he'd come with the gang and burn the house down.

This episode quenched their spirits for a while; but things brightened by the later afternoon. Matt sang Cockney ballads with May Shannon who had dropped in, and Tremaine obliged with the one song he remembered from his Padstow childhood.

*'Rise up, Mr Lee, and joy you betide,
For summer is a-come unto day;
And bright is your bride that lies by your side,
In the merry morning of May.'*

The introduction of Matt's name, and the nods in Nell's direction when the bright bride was mentioned, always had an admired effect. Phyl was given her moment in the next stanza.

*'Arise up, Miss Tremaine, all in your smock of silk,
For summer is a-come unto day,
And all your body under as white as any milk
In the merry morning of May'*

She was annoyed to find herself blushing as Matt clapped and May winked at her with a dimpling smile. Somehow it was of Bette that she thought, though Bette wasn't as white as any milk underneath; she had a slightly swarthy tinge to her skin. How brave she is, thought Phyl. I'd never have done what she did, calling Harry in to find the rat; I'd just have felt miserable.

*'The maidens of Padstow might if they would,
For summer is a-come unto day,
They might have made a garland with the white rose and the red,
In the merry morning of May'*

Tremaine's voice was thin and strained, and yet everyone listened with as much intentness as if he had been Caruso or Chaliapin. The England of lost summers seemed crying plaintively in his weak tones. And when he came to the finale Matt joined in, knowing and loving the stanza, and Phyl was drawn by his grin and gesture to add her voice as well, and May dimpled and sang, and even Mrs Tremaine with a sad deprecating smile hummed the tune.

*'Unite and unite, and let us all unite,
For summer is a-come unto day,
And whither we are going we all will unite
In the merry morning of May.'*

'Ah, there's no more mornings like that now,' said Tremaine, drinking and wiping his moustache.

'I reckon that song ought to be better known,' said Matt. He repeated:

*'And whither we are going we all will unite
In the merry morning of May.'*

'Ugh,' said May, shuddering. 'I wish it was May. These mornings I wake up like a block of ice. I wish someone would lend me a husband or a hot-water bottle that doesn't get cold.'

IV *Clash and Counter-clash*

14

Lancashire

THE PITHEAD WAS illuminated with strong floodlighting. Henderson and other officials were waiting on the steps of the Hall with the Union representatives. Over the door a notice read: 'This Colliery is now Managed by the National Coal Board and Belongs to the People.' One of the men waiting about called in friendly tone to the manager. 'Hallo, Comrade Henderson.' And the manager waved cheerily. The same man, who was a little drunk, shouted, 'Three Cheers for Comrade Henderson!' And the cheers were given.

'We've all got to pull together now,' said Henderson.

The secretary and chairman of the Union branch came up and climbed the steps. They shook hands with Henderson and the others, conferred a moment, and then went down together towards the pit-head. Henderson looked at his watch.

'What's the time?' someone asked.

'Two minutes off People's Ownership,' he replied with a smile.

They came up near the pithead, and the bandmaster ran over with a slight waddle, said something hoarsely, and then ran off again. Suddenly the first siren cried sharply, and then sirens and whistles from all over the landscape of the night answered and mingled and rose in a wailing exultant shriek heavenwards. The miners, many of whom had brought their wives along to see the ceremony, cheered and waved their caps. As the bright blue flag of national ownership fluttered up the flagpole under the winding-gear, the cheers rose in ever-higher swell, and caps were flung in the air as well as waved. A bugle sounded the Last Post and then Reveille. The death of the old and the morning of the new. The silver band of the colliery, its players wearing sweaters and overcoats, broke into *Jerusalem*, and all the voices joined sweepingly in. Then as the song ended, many of the singers went straight on into *The Red Flag*, and again all the voices swung powerfully together.

'Ah, see him,' said one of the lads, pointing to one of the overmen, 'he looks different already.'

They all laughed, and the overman, who hadn't quite caught what was said, stared angrily for a moment, then thought better of it, waved his hand and turned away.

'I never thought I'd live to see it,' said one old miner with tears streaming down his cheeks. 'I never thought I'd live to see it; God be praised.'

'N.C.B.,' a lad read from the flag 'That's a message to the Tories: Never Come Back.' Then he turned to the old man, 'But it isn't as easy as all that, dad. There's lots to do yet.'

The band was marching round and round, playing march tunes. Sky-rockets went up, showering in liquid red and green stars over the pit and its slagheaps, and momentarily lighting up the tall chimneys of the nearer factories and mills. The sudden transitory light effects, the strong contrast of the enveloping night and the floodlit pithead with its sharp lines and looming masses of corrugated-iron sheds and machinery—all this had a sharp, dramatic effect, an opposition of gaunt huge forms and flashing stars of transformation. As if some tremendous force was being liberated out of and over the dark Lancashire earth where the slagheaps and sooted mills had spread for so many years a deadly ugliness, a hell of dirt and poverty.

'Eec, this is our Victory Night,' said a tall woman with folded arms. 'This is the end of our war.'

'It's not the end of Armageddon, my dear,' said her short husband at her side. 'Yet still I say Glory to God.'

Dick found his father talking fervidly with a group of men of his own age, recalling all the strikes and lock-outs and disputes of the last fifty years, but turning again and again to 1926 and the great hopes of the General Strike. Ah, if A. J. Cook had only lived to see this day! Remember it all. The Coal Owners' Government of 1925, and the answer: Not a penny off the pay, not a minute on the day! Remember in this hour of triumph. The violent attacks on the Unions, on all the good fighters, after the Strike was called off by Thomas and Ramsay MacDonald and the rest of the traitors. Rising unemployment, less shifts a week for those in work, victimisation, starvation wages, collieries closing down, local authorities made dependent on loans authorised by the government, Guardians refusing assistance to poverty-stricken families. Remember it all. Subsistence wage reduced to six and tenpence per shift for married men, who were lucky if they got a fourth shift. Men disqualified as recipients of Labour Exchange benefit and often getting only ten shillings a head for adult dependants, two or three bob a week for each child. Evictions. Aye, remember it all. Ministry of Labour issuing regulations to wipe the unemployed off the registers—disqualify them as having 'no reasonable prospects of securing work'; 'not making genuine effort to find work', 'too old'; 'too young'. Anything would do. 'Apply to relations for maintenance where relations bring in more than thirteen shillings a week per head.'

Aye, aye, remember it all. The March on London decided on at the meetings on the Penrhys Mountains. The Scots coming through our own market-place, good lads. N.U.W. Glasgow Contingent against the Means Test. Our own banners with the slogan: *Workers Unite, We Will not Starve in Silence*—the painter making the word *Silence* the biggest of the lot. *The Daily Mail* burnt in the public square at Swindon. To hell with a world that says a man, wife, and four children can live on sixteen bob a week. Aye, remember it all, down to every death, every sob, every rattle in the stony chest, every blot of blood on the sheet, every child with rickets, every day and night of stupefying hunger. Remember we had to fight for every breath of air we took. Remember they gave us nothing we didn't struggle for through grinding years of misery and hardship.

'Ah, but the young know nothing of it. They think the world's always been the way it is.'

Dick walked off, clenching his hands. Oh my people. Anger and love wrestled in his thoughts. No, we mustn't forget. There's danger the moment we forget . . . the soldiers scrambling from the lorries with masked faces, Mike and Sam hanged from the oaks, Mary moaning with broken loins, Joan with her head bloody against the wall. In the shadows, the men who had lived on the deaths and the agonies of the miners. Ready to spring again. Ready to twist everything.

The band was playing *The Grenadiers*. The last rocket burst in a golden bush of stars. A man was climbing up on a friend's back to get his cap from the roof of a shed. Round a wagon he came on Mike with Mary. 'Did you see Joan?' Mary asked.

'No, I thought she couldn't come.'

'She was able to, after all. She went off looking for something. I wouldn't be surprised if its name began with a D.'

Dick was jolted. He turned and went back towards the pithead and the sheds over on the right. He wanted to call Joan's name, to find her at all costs. To prove, by finding her, that all his fears, all his intuitions of a dark ambush, were unnecessary. He passed Henderson the manager chatting with some of the face-men, 'To be fully efficient we must replace cyclic mining by continuous work. . . .' But Joan was nowhere. She must have gone home before Mike and Mary. And his failure to find her depressed him, made him feel that an ill-disposed force was striving to come between them.

After the excitement of Vesting Day things went on much the same in the mine. But there was a crowded branch meeting, at which the manager spoke. An event that was a seven-days'-wonder for the old-timers. The manager at a trade-union meeting, telling them to cleave

fast to their Union organisation, but to remember always the new situation. 'We're all in the same boat now,' he said. 'There's no need for the old antagonisms. In fact, they'd sink the boat. There's no more rival interests. The good of the miners and the good of the nation are now identical. Let's say good-bye to the past. Forget your grievances, for you've won at last and the pits are yours. All complaints will be listened to, and wherever there's anything really wrong, it will be remedied.'

He suggested that the men should think over all their complaints about bad conditions, all their suggestions for increased efficiency and lighter work, and send them in to the Joint Consultative Committee. And he said that he'd see if it were possible to hold the next meeting of that committee in public, so that the men could see how their counsels were heeded and if necessary put forward arguments on the spot.

There was considerable applause, and the rest of the items on the agenda were rather hurried through. But the discussion in the canteen afterwards wasn't so unanimous.

'Henderson meant every word he said,' remarked Frank Wilson. 'But one man's sincerity can't lighten the vast burden of the compensation being paid or turn a bureaucratic class-structure into a socialist one.'

'I had an idea that the Russians were always attacking their own bureaucrats,' said Mike, 'and that, in fact, bureaucrat was the worst insult you could use in the Soviet Union.'

'That proves my point,' said Wilson. 'Of course you get a carry-over of bureaucracy into socialism, but that doesn't matter as long as you offset it with workers' control from the very beginning.'

'Ah, you're a doubter and a carper,' said Old Andy, who had gone up in the pit's delegation to the House of Commons when the Bill was being passed. 'You can't move mountains without faith. You should have seen the House on the night of the Bill. We were all toasting the death of capitalism in the bar.'

'It's very lively for a corpse.'

'Ah, but it's had a sore blow. You should have seen the faces and heard the songs. One of the Labour Whips comes up and drinks with us. Down with Herbie Morrison! he shouts. Down with Herbie and up with socialism! Ah, if you'd been there, you'd have known it was a revolution. The screw of the thumb is not going to return. No, I tell you, the screw of the thumb is not going to return!'

These words gained general assent, and Wilson shrugged his shoulders. 'Okay, dad, you win. But the fight isn't ended yet.'

The under-manager, whom Dick didn't like, had a talk about the promised course. March or April would be the date, though final de-

tails hadn't yet come through. 'But don't you worry, Baxter. We'll look after you. We very much appreciate you young fellows coming back to us from the Army, and you can be sure we'll keep our eye on you. . . .'

Dick thanked him, but went off feeling resentful. Henderson didn't talk like that, putting *We* on one side and *Workers* on the other.

His thoughts were still considerably exercised with the problem of adaptation to the hard work of the pit. He'd been taken off the face again, and had been put on to various datal jobs, nominally haulage—but in the long run, as he remarked to his mother, it all came back to shovelling. His pit-sense was now reliable. One day he drew back and pulled a companion with him, in time to escape a small fall that might have broken their limbs or cracked their skulls. He felt altogether at home. In the hot atmosphere of the baths he and Mike had sparring matches and made fun of Ned Trimble, who was so proud of his muscles that he bought (by post) the nudist health magazines and sent his photo into all competitions for well-developed males. 'You go to one of these nudist colonies next August,' said Mike, who refused to believe that there were camps where girls like those shown in the magazine went strolling about with nothing on, 'and send us a wire if it's safe.'

The miners felt themselves for once in the lee of the trade-union struggles bursting out in so many other parts of Britain. The year had ended with the threat of the workers in the London power-houses to close down. Now there was a tenants' strike in Birmingham, trouble among the clippies on the London buses, strikes looming up in the Clyde yards, haulage disputes in London, and dock problems getting worse at all the ports. At the same time more and more big works and factories were saying that they'd have to close down through shortness of coal. That was something which came home to the miners, but there seemed no relation between the pit-work and the increasing shortages. Coal was being cut according to schedule, even a bit past it; and if there were bottlenecks in the distribution systems beyond the pithead, that was someone else's headache, mainly the railways. The only general theme much mentioned was the claim that the N.U.M. had put in just before Christmas for a wages overhaul.

'We could do with a few shillings more,' said Dick, putting down the slip on which the list of stoppages on his pay was detailed. 'Look at this. Permanent Relief 7d., Hospital 4d., Mutual Help 7d., Pick-sharpening 3d., Sports 1d., Red Cross 1d., Safety Boots 1s., Check-weigh Fund 1s. 2d., Health and Pensions 2s., Unemployment 10d. . . . How about that for a weekly hole, not to mention income tax? At least, dad, you might give me the one and tuppence back.'

'Serves you right,' said Alice, who, after a week's constipation, had just taken a large dose of Epsom salts and was awaiting the worst. 'You should have found a decent job while you had the chance.' She took up her copy of *Romeo and Juliet* and repeated, 'O me, this sight of death is as a bell, that warns my old age to a sepulchre.' Her stomach gurgled and she winced. 'O me, this sight of death is as a bell, that warns my old age to a sepulchre.' She stood up to declaim the lines without a book. 'O me——'

Dick beat on a glass with a fork. 'O me, this sight of Alice is a hell.'

'Make him shut up, mum,' said Alice. 'He's trying to stop me learning my part.' She clutched her stomach. 'And I'm not well.'

'Let her be, Dick,' said Mrs Baxter. 'She's doing her best.'

Joseph's insurance company had an Amateur Theatrical and Operatic Society, and they were staging *Romeo and Juliet*. He had managed to get Alice taken in as Lady Capulet, as there was a scarcity of women players, *The Mikado* being also in rehearsal. At first Dick had mocked and said he wouldn't be seen dead at such a lousy show, he wasn't interested in Shakespeare, and he didn't want to see Alice making a public fool of herself. Cornered, he had to admit that apart from being taken as a school-boy to see Donald Wolfitt as Shylock, the only play by Shakespeare he had seen was *Twelfth Night*, given by some tenth-rate ENSA company, to which he had gone fuddled with half a dozen pints of muddy beer, and which had seemed to him very peculiar—the only good moment being when Sir Toby Somebody had tripped on his sword and fallen flat, but whether that was in the play or had been an accident, he didn't know.

Mrs Baxter had been reduced to a state of intellectual and moral confusion by having to read the Nurse's part so that Alice could rehearse at home what she called her Big Scene, beginning, 'Nurse, where's my daughter: call her forth to me.' Mrs Baxter found it impossible to reply, 'Now, by my maidenhead . . .' She said she'd always thought Shakespeare was Poetry, and this scene was more like the local music-hall in its rumbustious days. And when Alice came to the lines, 'Well, think of marriage now . . .' Dick applauded so vigorously that Alice lost her temper and threw her book at him, and Mrs Baxter seized the chance of escaping to the larder.

'If I do come, I'll roar with laughter,' said Dick, 'and disgrace you.'

'You'll do that, anyhow,' said Alice, and fled with rumbling stomach.

'A truly Shakespearean scene,' said Baxter, smiling benignly.

When he heard that Joseph was Mercutio, his threats of disorderly laughter grew worse. Between listening to Alice and glancing at her copy of the play, he thought he had a fair idea of what it was about—

though, in fact, he had only read odd bits. However, he looked at Mercutio's speech about Queen Mab, and couldn't imagine Joseph delivering it. 'Listen to this, too. Just think how he'll bring the house down when he chuffers away: If love be rough with you, be rough with love. That's a fair warning, Alice.' And when he saw Joseph, he saluted him with the cry, 'Treat her rough, Mercutio. That's your cue.'

In the end he agreed to go, and, indeed, he'd grown curious to see the show. He went round to call on Joan and ask her to go with him. She lived with two aunts, both widows. One was bedridden, the younger worked in the card-room at a cotton-mill and had a girl aged fifteen who did most of the housework but who was keen to get into a mill like her mother.

This girl, Lucy, let him in. 'Joan's in the kitchen washing herself. Just go straight through.'

'Wait a moment,' shouted her mother, Mrs Fitton. 'She's only got nothing on.'

'Oh yes, I forgot,' said Lucy. She peered at him. 'You're Dick Baxter, aren't you?'

'Bring him in,' shouted Mrs Fitton. 'She's presentable now.'

'Rings on her fingers and bells on her toes,' giggled Lucy.

She gave Dick a push and he went in. 'Anything for a change in this dreary house,' said Mrs Fitton, welcoming him. 'Good evening to you, Dick Baxter. I wasn't made for a houseful of women. It don't seem right, specially at week-ends. I like something happening all the while. Now for summat fresh, as Adam o' Rappers said when he slid off the kitchen slate into the mudden-hole. Aye, I feel as bad as that sometimes.'

'Aye, you do, mum,' said Lucy. 'So do I, too.'

'Copy-cat,' said Mrs Fitton, rolling about loose-bodied in her wicker arm-chair, knitting furiously all the while.

'You've got a nice little house here,' said Dick, at a loss what to say. 'And well-kept, too.' He looked round the room with its huge dresser, its solid table and chairs that left little space for movement. By the dresser hung two engravings, one of a sunset on a highland lake by Turner, and one of the vast terrors of the Flood by John Martin.

'It might be worse, but I'm not one that can say her prayers to a well-stoned doorstep. I like to be up and doing, though I know to my bitterness that folks can't expect to have youth at both ends of their life, and we've either got to grow old or die young. I suppose I'll never get out of this holl till I'm carried out feet foremost.'

Lucy sat on a stool, hugging her knees and looking big-eyed at her mother. 'Mum, shall I make him some tea?'

'I'll be in in a moment,' called Joan whom Dick had glimpsed moving about in front of the scullery-sink.

'There's time and place for everything, and tea for all occasions,' Mrs Fitton went on, and Lucy skipped up from her stool. 'As for myself, I've had bad luck all my born days. The old man—him that fathered young Lucy here—he was a fellow for a quiet life. You couldn't quarrel with him if you tried.'

'Why?' Lucy asked, disregarded.

'He had only one ambition in his head,' said Mrs Fitton, wrestling wildly with her knitting. 'To get a hair off the old dog into him, and then sit in front of the fire as quiet as a pot doll. Yes, pour out the tea, Lucy. That's one thing at least which never comes amiss in a ravelled world.' She shook her head and nodded upstairs to indicate her sister. 'She won't be long with us, poor soul. I'll take you up to see her. Her hands are as thin as a comb. It's enough to make you cry your shoes full. Listen. Not a sound. She's been as quiet as chapel for three hours.'

Joan came in, with her hair wrapped round in a towel. 'Hallo, Dick. You would choose my shampoo night?'

'I told him he was putting his head in a dog kennel,' said her aunt, 'coming reckless into a house of women like this, the Lord save us. Where's that tea, Lucy?'

'I'm just getting some tea-leaves off,' said Lucy, brandishing a teaspoon.

'Don't bother about tea-leaves. They sink or we drink 'em. Don't fuss so much. Keep your heart out of your clogs. I never saw such a fretter. But that mole on the side of your nose is a sign that the devil's marked you for his own.' Then to Joan, 'Sit you down, and you'll be less by the legs. I can't bear to see people standing for no reason like a heron in a duckpond.'

Dick told Joan his errand, and Mrs Fitton said that she was glad he hadn't asked her, the only kind of show she liked was something with music in it, and the music loud at that. 'You can't beat a brass band for lifting the roof. But as for your Shakespeare, I never met him, and I daresay he doesn't want to meet me. It's a fine thing is learning. It takes no room up, and then the bailiffs can't take it from you. But all the same, it's not for me, unless I got my own address down wrong, Mrs Topsyturvy of Uneducated Street. I've no more use for a book than a duck has for an umbrella. But take no notice of me, young man. Older and madder. That's me. If I was young again, I'd be a terror. The whole trouble was that I married a Birkle man, and they're never at home unless they keep their marriages and their brass all in the family. Aye, there's a deal on 'em sib and sib, rib and rib, all of a litter, Fittons and Diggles and Diggles and Fittons over again, till

they're all second cousins to one another, and Timothy Fitton had the banns called for marrying his grandmother before he found out his mistake and married his great-aunt instead.'

Lucy was serving the tea when thumping began overhead. 'Go and find out what she wants, young Lucy,' said Mrs Fitton, nodding aloft. 'Her temper'll never be mouldy with keeping. But it's only fit and proper Lucy should get the sting of her tongue, seeing that she's her sole heir. Aye, three houses in Oldham will come to her when Eadie takes her reed and gears in.'

Lucy glanced at Dick to make sure that he's heard this important piece of news, and then went upstairs.

'Next Thursday,' said Dick to Joan, whose face was shining with the shampoo. A few curling wisps of hair stuck out from under her towel-turban, which in its tightness pulled the skin up over her cheekbones and gave her a slightly foreign look.

She smiled. 'I always feel a bit dizzy after a shampoo, as if I'm still standing on my head.'

'As indeed you are,' said Mrs Fitton oracularly. 'And why not?'

As they entered the local school-hall where the play was being given, he bought a smudgily printed programme and felt a certain pride in reading: *Lady Capulet . . . Miss Alice Baxter*. A note said that the producer had decided (because of the difficulty of scene changes in the restricted stage space and because the best Shakespearean productions now used single sets) to try some experimental effects, for which he craved the audience's forbearance.

The audience was mostly friends or relations of the clerks in the Insurance Company; but the girl in the expensively cut evening-dress in front of Dick was surely the daughter of one of the directors. He disliked her and her young man in a dress-suit, and tried to hear what they were saying. But they spoke in whispers, of which he caught only the stilted inflexion. They stared at some of the audience as they came in, and certainly made jokes about them. If the curly headed sod turns and stares at me and Joan like that, Dick thought, I'll land him one. He felt out of place, and for the first time wanted Alice to be good at her part.

Pat came in with a young fellow in a bright blue shirt and red bow-tie. She looked her usual self-contained self, and stood for a moment sweeping the hall with calm eyes before she moved along between the rows to her seat. She'd had her hair specially done, and she didn't just push past the knees, she waited till the persons to be passed stood up.

Joan didn't know anything about the play, and Dick, imagining that he knew more of it than he did, started to tell her the story, but

soon got into difficulties. So he said it was more exciting if you didn't know what was to come. And all the while he felt the presence of Pat, two rows behind, and had to keep on resisting the impulse to turn round. He hadn't particularly noted what Joan was wearing, satisfied with a general feeling that she looked fine in her neat brown jumper and her pleated skirt, but now he tried covertly to study her and decide how she'd appear to critical female eyes.

The show was a quarter of an hour late in starting, and there were several ominous banging noises, muffled orders and hurrying feet, before the curtains jerked and parted. The set consisted of a backcloth with pillars and doors painted on (presumably by a drunken child), while someone with more ambition than skill had essayed the Venus di Milo at one side. The middle door did, in fact, open precariously, and over it was a small top-heavy-looking cage (which later turned out to be the balcony). From one side entered two retainers, chosen for the parts because, while lacking any capacity to act, they were lanky and showed off their hose to advantage. They strutted and gripped the hilts of their lathe-swords, and for one dreadful moment it seemed as if they had forgotten their opening lines. Then the one in red, with anxious adam's-apple, squeaked, 'Gregory, on my word, we'll not carry coals,' and the one in buff answered gruffly, 'No, for then we should be colliers.'

Dick was astonished. He couldn't believe that the play really opened with those lines, and resolved to look up the text as soon as he reached home. And if he found that Joseph had written those lines in as an insult to miners, he'd knock him down. For a few moments he couldn't attend to what was being said, and then the squeaker was remarking nervously, 'My naked weapon is out.' Dick guffawed, and at once feared that Joan (or the green girl in front or Pat behind) would think him coarse-minded; but the fear turned to a sense of defiance and he decided to laugh again at the next rough bit. The scene, however, became tamer, except for Gregory backing right up against the cloth and making the pillars quiver. Then Lord and Lady Capulet came in, with Alice Capulet so made-up that she seemed bruised on both cheekbones. Dick listened with increasing perturbation, unable to remember where Alice came in or how much she had to say in this scene. When her turn came she pitched her voice too high, and 'A crutch! a crutch!' sounded like a screeching stammer. She coughed and spoiled the rest of her line, and she had only one line in the whole scene, it appeared. Dick knew she'd be fuming, and was sorry for her.

The long speeches of the Prince and the others were delivered in an elocutionary sort of way that made it impossible to listen for their meaning; and Dick was beginning to feel sorry he'd come and brought

Joan. But Romeo turned out not at all bad, able to speak verse more naturally, and the play began to settle down when he asked, 'Is the day so young?'

Dick gave up hovering between a general scorn of the whole thing and a fear that Alice would shame the family. And, indeed, she recovered herself after the first fiasco, and played the scene with the Nurse quite tolerably—somewhat stridently, all on one note, but providing the background for the Nurse's chatter. Juliet was a small blonde, whose voice was weak but who clearly felt the part with some intensity and intelligence. She talked in a dreamy sort of way that Dick rather liked. At first it made him shy, but he liked it and then he forgot to feel shy. Gradually his resistance went, and he felt himself drawn into the movement of the play. Even the mishaps of the Ball Scene, when the players all got in one another's way in a dance that worked out like Oranges and Lemons, even the bombast of Joseph's enunciation, even the way in which the lighting system faded out in the Orchard Scene, then blazed up and went out again, lighted up the hall instead of the stage, went out again and then picked out a demented stage-hand trying to stop a side-flat from falling over—even all these incompetencies could not spoil the performance. Dick grinned but still felt the play itself

Every now and then lines came home with a force for which he was unprepared *Thou know'st the mask of night is on my face. O wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied? . . . I gave thee mine before thou didst require it, and yet I would it were to give again . . . How silversweet sound lovers' tongues by night. . . .* Lines that would have left him unmoved on the printed page seemed now to cry out from some unknown darkness inside himself, some tryst of a lost happiness, some crag of an indomitable hope.

In the intervals he didn't want to talk, and smoked steadily. Joan seemed to feel his mood, and didn't start making comments on the acting and the production. She merely said, 'Enjoying it?' And he replied, 'Yes. . . . Let's see how it ends. . . .' They met Pat on the way back to their seats, but he was hardly moved at all. He merely took hold of Joan's arm and she pressed his hand against her side. And he was glad when the curtain divided again and the familiar backcloth reappeared, with the balcony looking even nearer to toppling.

The way that Romeo is at first in love with one girl and then falls for Juliet, gave the play a personal significance for him, as if vindicating his own actions, and helped to bring the conflict home to his own experience. And as the actors, more confident than in the first act, warmed to their parts afresh, he became unaware of any ver-
artifice. The words seemed the right and natural words. Even th

weak lighting ceased to distract him, and the dimness of the love scenes seemed the correct setting of shadowy fear and hope. After all, you didn't have a shaft of light on you when you took a girl down a side-lane or behind the advertisement hoardings near the gasworks. It was more like this. Only you didn't say those words. You didn't say them, but somewhere you felt them.

The moments of dim dark with changes into floodlight indeed helped him to feel something in the words, the way they kept playing round the ideas of dark and light. A contrast that anyone working in a pit could understand fast enough. Dark and light. The bowelled darkness of the earth and the leap of expanding light. *The grey-eyed morn smiles on the frowning night . . . Good night, good night, parting is such sweet sorrow. . . . Lovers can see to do their amorous rites by their own beauties . . . For thou wilt lie upon the wings of night. . . . All the world will be in love with night*

The maze of love lost in a darkness of hatred and suddenly lighted by its own starry delights. The sleeping beauty hidden in the dark tomb, the light ready to be struck from the flint of darkness. He found himself absorbed in the words of the play, in its pattern of emotion, in its clash of images. And this clash, this movement of light and night, had somehow a deep relevance to his memories of the pit, the winding galleries, the blurred lamps and their gaps of darkness, the omnipresent menace. *Did ever dragon keep so fair a cave? . . . In the fearful hollow of thine ear. . . .*

When Alice came on again, he forgot his worry for her. Even she couldn't break the spell with her harsh, 'Why, how now, Juliet?' And so the play moved to its exalting and bitter conclusion, and his excitement, his sense of deep participation, mounted with the climax. Always he had that feeling of a movement through dark and dangerous galleries, into the mysterious tomb, the meeting-place of the star-crossed lovers, where the light and the night seemed to fuse and struggle in furious convergence.

*The lean abhorred monster keeps
Thee here in dark to be his paramour . . .*

Till the last line: *See what a scourge is laid upon your hate.* And he felt himself justified, all the dark forces of his world rebuked. He wanted suddenly to be very close to Joan, to understand her and give her the tenderness that would make her flower into her full self. He pressed her hand and she responded.

Then the lights again and the clapping, and the actors trooping on and holding hands in a line and bowing—with Alice looking as proud as though she'd earned the whole play. But Dick didn't feel satirical

about her; she'd done her best and the whole thing had been worth while. In his chastened mood he felt sorry for having made things more difficult for her and decided to be kinder in the future. A record began *God Save the King* half-way through the third bar, and everyone stood up, and then the record stopped abruptly at 'Send him vict—' After hesitating a moment to make sure that the thing wouldn't start again, they shuffled out into the windy dim street.

'Are you going to wait for Alice?'

'No, Joseph will look after her.'

His voice sounded strange to him, and he didn't know what to say. Now that it was all over, it was hard to believe it had ever been. What had been? Something that he wouldn't find if he went home and read through the play. Or would he? Perhaps he would now, or some of it; but it wouldn't have been there if he hadn't first seen the play. What had he seen? On the one hand the not-so-very-good performance that it'd be easy to make fun of, and on the other hand something that had seemed to strike deep into his experience, making clear what had been dark, and yet all lost again in this bewildered mood of return to the everyday world, the dim windy street with rain coming up. Lost, yes, but would it cease to haunt him somewhere with its mysterious sweetness, its anger, its triumph?

He didn't really want to talk. 'Of course they weren't very good, and yet I enjoyed it.'

'So did I. At first I thought it was going to be awful, but it got better.'

'Yes, I'm glad I went, and I almost didn't.'

He wondered if Joan had felt the same as he had. She could hardly have felt the imagery of dark galleries and sudden light transitions as he had, but she might have felt something similar, the same emotions translated into terms of her own experience. At last he said, 'It wasn't like anything I've ever seen before.'

She said slowly, 'It's the words, I suppose. But I never cared much for poetry at school.'

'No, I always thought it soppy.'

'After all,' she said, 'there must be some sense in Shakespeare being so famous.'

'Yes, it's the words,' he agreed. 'And yet it isn't. I suppose that's what poetry is, the way it makes you think of your own life. . . . I mean, you feel almost as if it had been written specially for you, even though it was written hundreds of years ago. As if it was about you, and not about you . . . about everyone . . . about everything. I don't know how to put it.'

'I know exactly what you mean,' she said firmly. And he was sure

she did, and that made him sure of his own meaning, sure that he wasn't talking nonsense. 'Let's see some more plays sometimes.'

'Yes, I'd like to.'

'When the weather's better, we'll go to Manchester. I suppose it's easy to see Shakespeare there.'

'We did *The Merchant of Venice* at school.'

He drew her aside into the shadow and she came softly into his arms. She lay with her head sideways in his arms, her mouth half parted for his kiss and her eyes closed. As if asleep, waiting to be brought back to the light of life. As if only he could find her in the maze of darkness and restore her to the everyday world. He wanted to say a thousand things, and kissed her.

★

Towards January's end reports from all over Britain showed increases in the production of coal. The miners felt cheerfully proud, and considered that anyone in the world rather than themselves was to blame for the fuel crisis, the cutting-off of power supplies, the closing-down of factories and mills. Opinion was divided only as to whether the bureaucrats and bosses were merely incompetent or were plotting to sabotage the nationalised industry.

'You don't call it a coincidence,' said Mike in the pub one night. 'Pits nationalised and industry starts folding up.'

'Are you saying the Almighty's on the side of the bosses?' asked Sam. 'I always thought it was the Devil.'

'Ah, it's bitter cold,' agreed Old Ben, 'my corns don't half twinge.'

'Ah, maybe it'll mend soon,' said Sally the proprietress. 'It can't go on for ever. It'd be too aggravating.'

But it didn't mend. The snowstorms came down in a yellow darkness and every lull was followed by a fresh fury of snow. 'Like the ending of the world,' said Isaac Pendal, who was lay-preacher as well as ripper, as one afternoon they came up out of the pit into the dull glare. 'I always thought it'd happen this way. In a dwindling of the sky and a great shroud over the earth to hide its mucky sins, with the remnant crying for mercy on the mountain-tops.'

It was warm enough in the mine, and every time they came up with their grimed faces to confront the whiteness of the frozen world, they felt surprised. More than ever they looked grotesque with red lips outlined on the black-dusted faces, and eyes that seemed strange and lost in the coal-masks, as they trudged through the snow to the baths.

Soon men had to be put on clearing the track; and every morning at the bus-halts there were rumours that the buses had stopped run-

ning. The men who lived farther out in the countryside found it increasingly difficult to get in to the pithead at all. But at least there was coal at home, and blazing fires on return from work.

Henderson the manager called the mass-meeting to discuss what could be done to improve working conditions and efficiency. On account of the weather, it was held in the canteen. Henderson made a speech, calling for an end of grouching and absenteeism, and asking the miners to look on the pit as their own, to forward any suggestions to the Joint Consultative Committee. He promised to do everything in his power to have all valuable ideas put into action.

Some of the men near Dick muttered remarks about the Coal Board and bureaucrats, but Henderson's prestige was too high for them to shout back. Most of the miners considered that Henderson was making a fair and good speech, and even those who doubted that he'd be able to carry out his promises as largely as he seemed to think, were ready to wait and see.

The N.U.M. secretary followed with similar remarks, saying that the Union would now play an active part in the running of the industry and that therefore the men must make a much more extended and thorough use of the Consultative Committee than in the past. Then the men's representatives had had to fight increased exploitation and demand better conditions, but now they had to regard technical efficiency and better conditions, welfare and regular shift-attendance as all being equally their concern.

When suggestions were asked for, there was silence for a moment, till Henderson remarked that there must be many complaints possible about backward methods or imperfect materials, bottlenecks or failures of some sort or another.

At last a miner shouted, 'Have a look at the belts on Top Hard faces.' Then comments or complaints came fast on one another. 'Don't forget how the cutter failed on 6's T face.' 'The main compressor leaks and there's overloading on the branch ranges.' 'Shortage of ten- and eight-foot rings.' 'The pull-lifts for moving dead cutting machines aren't strong enough.' 'There'd be enough rings maybe if they were properly salvaged.' 'What about riding out on the trams to the faces?'

Some of the suggestions dealt with small matters, easily remedied; others, if carried out, would need large-scale reorganisation and expense. An argument about Panel A Loader led to Henderson promising that a new belt would be installed there, and a new-type drum as well, which should improve things considerably. Then came complaints about the delivery of coal allowances to noon-shift workers, and about the quality of the coal supplied.

After a while Henderson called the meeting to an end. He said that he thought it had served a useful purpose. Many of the statements had given him ample food for thought, and he hoped that what had been begun today would continue in ever-strengthened forms. He thanked the men for their confidence and said that he would always do his best to deserve it. As for riding out to the faces on the trams, that would mean extra work for the rider and the engine-driver and perhaps half a dozen hauliers; but he agreed that too much time was wasted on getting to and from work below ground. There were a number of shortages, beyond a doubt, and he'd begin fresh pressures to have these overcome. Let the men remember that the eyes of Britain were on them. Don't be disheartened by the fact that Vesting Day had been followed at once with such a sharpening of the fuel crisis. Rather welcome the challenge that the crisis threw down, and show the world what the miners of Britain, entering on their heritage, could achieve in the hour of national need. Such a moment brought home to the nation how dependent they were on the miners.

Without any display of enthusiasm, the meeting broke up.

And once again things settled back into their routine. Dick had seen little of Joan since the performance of *Romeo and Juliet*. She was needed at home where the cold weather had laid her Aunt Fitton out with a bad chill. 'Two sick aunts,' she said, with a commiserative smile, 'and Lucy asking questions.' However, they went a couple of times to the cinema and clasped hands, but nothing was said in that darkness where the figures coming and going on the screen seemed to have no meaning except to cheat them out of everyday thought. Joan laid her head on his shoulder, and they were content while the warm darkness held them.

The cold grew worse and worse. One payday as the morning and afternoon shifts were meeting—both in work-clothes, but one lot blackened and the other lot clean-faced—he joined the line of men filing up to the pay-desk, stamping, flapping arms, blowing into hands. Sam stamped too hard and complained that the bits of detonator-wire wouldn't hold his torn trousers together any longer. Others joined in knots of talk, looked over their docketts and grumbled, or went off to the small shed where the trade-union secretary waited.

Cripples, men with missing arms and bandaged faces, men with caving-in chests, stood grouped together. A lad was complaining, 'They put me on to a man's job, but look at my pay, not a farthing more, sod 'em.' Dick left the pay-line for a moment to chat with a friend whose arm had been broken. And at last his time came to be paid.

He hurried into the canteen to get warm. On the other side of the battered trestle-tables a five-deep queue was slowly moving towards the counter. Other men were pushing through with steak-pies or sausages to the benches. Johnny the joker came in and passed Dick by, pretending to be weighed down with the pay in his hand. On one side some officials were chatting. A doctor with an R.A.F. moustache looked in, spoke to an official, then went off with his bag to the cars. The noise of his motor mingled for a moment with the noise of the shivering and rattling pit-screens.

Dick managed to get a cup of tea, and sat at a table. Around him the others were talking and laughing, but he felt withdrawn into himself, not so much tired as caught in a dim drift of dream-wrack. The last compensation case was dealt with, a cripple helped by his wan little wife, the compensation clerks shut their books and exchanged some lazy cracks; an official hurried out to speak to one of them. The pay clerks were gathering the remaining envelopes together, checking sheets. Red Sara, who'd been shambling round the end of the room with her broom, came up and remarked confidentially, 'I been insulted. What's going to happen next?' But he couldn't make out what she went on to say in her hasty mumbling. The officials had gone. The trade-union committee were getting together over by the door to the big draughty room where they met, Mike among them, and hurrying Robby the secretary and leisurely Bobby the chairman, the So-and-So Twins—both of them being given to fill-in the gaps in their discourse with the phrase 'and so and so' or 'and so on'.

'Going to sleep here?' asked the girl, brushing the table.

He went outside and stood staring at the pithead, the world of snow, the closing sky; and he felt as he'd felt when convalescing from the wound in Burma—only a slight leg-wound, but enough to jolt him, to make him feel his recovery as a rediscovery of the world. He'd lain for hours watching the changing pattern of boughs against the sky, or tracing with a pencil-point the intricate network of veins in a leaf. Everything had seemed strange and infinitely interesting. The little wrinkles at the corners of the nurse's eyes or an ant lugging a huge crumb. Why am I here? What am I doing in this strange world? What do I want?

The sharpening cold, the closing sky. Something falling apart. What was happening to Britain? What was the bond that held men together? The bough chafing on the sky, the flicker of reflected flames on the ceiling. He felt a fear gnawing at his breast-bone, and his body seemed hollow, brittle. Something was wrong, something deep down; but there were many good things. Mike's hearty grin, Joan's smile as gentle as it was clear, the men listening to Henderson, Henderson him-

self, and the words of *Romeo and Juliet*. Answers to the fear, the cruelty. Answers to death and the fear of death. Suddenly, as he stepped forward into the snow slush, he realised that he wanted to marry Joan, and that in her arms he would feel safe. And every step he took was a step away from the hidden enemy that was somehow seeking to destroy the many good things, to twist and lock them in an icy death. A step towards Joan and all the welcoming hands.

Yorkshire

HE WENT A couple of times more to the Discussion Group, but didn't feel as interested as on the first occasion. Jill wasn't there either time. The sports car was now wholly his—added to the office cars, he found, as part of the complicated system of evading or reducing taxes by means of expense accounts, travelling and entertainment charges, etc., which Swintons like all other firms used. And on week-ends he drove into the country, with Wotton or Colin, and drank at out-of-the-way places, discussing politics and anti-politics.

A statement signed by John Swinton had appeared in the local papers, warning of stoppages unless more coal was at once delivered. The editorial of Sprong's paper blamed the government for its doctrinaire practices, its setting of party shibboleths above national needs, its shameless support of socialist inefficiency against the skill and energy of private enterprise; the prosperity of Yorkshire, Britain, and the Empire was being threatened, how long would it be before an infuriated people hurled such fools and knaves from their usurped seat of power? But nothing further happened. Probably Swinton's illness had upset things; probably the letter and the editorial were all that had ever been intended.

Christmas passed without Swinton festivities. Swinton himself was convalescent and wanted things quiet. Despite Mrs Swinton's obscure feeling that to have no family Christmas was to commit a sin against the Holy Ghost, the younger girls went to stay with friends of their own age, and Joyce departed for a week at Harrogate. Kit, evading his mother's apologetic eyes and various invitations, spent the time drinking with Brian and minutely planning bold voyages of escape—to Hawaii or Blackpool, the Moon or Java.

'Why don't you go to the Dacres?' his mother asked. 'They've rung several times.'

'If I went,' he answered, 'I could hardly help meeting the Dacres there, and I'd rather make faces at fish in an aquarium.'

Politically he found himself agreeing more and more with Wotton, whose Libertarian Socialism had received a shock through Burnham's *Managerial Revolution*. Though still insisting on Libertarianism as an ideal, Wotton now considered the Managerial System unavoidable. The problem therefore was to adopt it as quickly and efficiently as possible, in the hope that a Libertarian world would somehow later emerge as the result of increased productivity. 'That's where I dissent from Burnham,' he said, 'though I can't see how you can disagree with most of what he says. It isn't what we'd like, but how are we going to stop it? No, he's right. It's no use saying, as your friend Colin does, that it's yet one more proof of the essential tragedy of the human situation. Burnham answers by asking with what meaning can the human situation as a whole be called either tragic or comic. Tragedy and comedy occur only within the human situation. There is no background against which to judge the human situation as a whole. It is merely what it happens to be.' He nodded. 'Yes, that floored me.'

Kit, too, was finding a certain satisfaction now in feeling that inextorable forces were controlling the situation and himself inside it. For those forces, as Burnham defined them, made his problem considerably easier. He listened while Wotton, drawing parallel lines on the café table-cloth with a fork, expounded the system. They had just visited the Leeds Art Gallery, and felt the need of coffee and talk.

Capitalism as liberal *laissez-faire*, Wotton argued, had outlived itself—that is, the wasteful, competitive forms that kept swinging the world between mad booms and desperate depressions. The experience of two world wars had shown how the national economy could be controlled, to the betterment of everyone. The future lay with a system of big State-corporations, Boards of Nationalisation, running the main industries and getting rid of waste and inefficiency. Why shouldn't Mr Swinton or Kit run the mill as a member of the managerial *élite*? What did it matter how the ownership was legally defined if the power was theirs?

'Yes,' said Kit, 'but what, then, is our attitude to the workers' claims during the period of transition? Do we support them if they strike, for instance, or do we fight them?'

'If the strike's justified through the waste and top-heavy inefficiency of the existing system, we support them, I should say.'

'And how do you decide that?'

'I know it isn't easy. I don't consider it fair to penalise our own firm on matters that need a national ruling.'

'Wasn't it you who told Sam the other night,' said Kit cruelly,

pleased to transfer his own dilemma, 'that the opposition of manual worker and black-coated scribe was outmoded and that both stood together, etc., etc.'

Wotton flushed, 'Yes, of course I did, and it's true. But you can't test its truth by simply saying the office sections must go on strike in sympathy whenever the mill-hands come out.' He tried to turn the tables. 'What about yourself?'

'In a justified cause,' said Kit, smiling.

They were silent a moment and then Kit turned over the pages of the gallery catalogue, and they began discussing the Rubenses and the Poussins. Wotton liked what he called the Intellectual Light of the Poussins, and Kit, out of cussedness, defended the work of Rubens. 'Yes, it's overdone, overblown, overfleshed and flashed. But life isn't a static pattern. Even our pegging-plans start moving like mad once they're set in action. It's the pattern in the making, not the made pattern, that's exciting. Life is always more than life, or it isn't life at all, it's already more than half-way to death. No, give me Rubens.' He had ended by being carried away with his own thesis, and felt reckless. I'll see Jill as soon as possible, he thought, and I'll make love to her. And he couldn't help remarking, 'You know, Jill could have sat for one of his headlong figures. Not so rounded fore and aft of course, but there's the same sort of feeling.'

Wotton flushed again and took out his cigarette-case. 'You know, Kit, I think you're rather given to building up large-scale edifices of thought on a purely personal basis. I hope you don't mind me being frank. Are you really interested in socialism, or are you just against your father? Are you —' His voice trailed away and he lit a cigarette.

Kit smiled, enjoying himself. For the first time he realised how keen Wotton was on Jill. 'Of course what you say is true to a certain extent — of me and everyone. We can't separate emotions and thoughts into neat compartments.' The impulse to harass Wotton grew stronger. 'Take Jill now. I'm quite fond of her, and you might argue I want to ravish her because she's come to represent the working-class. The organised working-class. If she surrenders, do I need to fight my father any longer? I'm on his side, you see — outraging the underdog, the underbitch. If she doesn't surrender, I'm antagonised, and so I come over to his side all the same.' He laughed. 'Or you can analyse it the exact opposite way. If Jill succumbs and takes me to her bosom and bowels, I'm one with the working-class. If she resists, she teaches me to respect her and her class, and I stand beside her in defence of human dignity.' He laughed again and stubbed his cigarette. 'Analysis is a two-edged weapon. I think Freud himself said that, and well he might. Colin was telling me the other day how that Horney woman gave him

tit for tat. You know he reduced women to castrated males and saw all their activity directed by penis-envy. Well, Horney reduced men to wombless females and saw all their productive activity as efforts to prove themselves the equals of the mothers. Both analyses are true and don't get you any further.'

'Yes,' said Wotton. 'I know you can push all analyses to a point where they become over-balanced, fall over, and stand on their heads. But that doesn't prove there wasn't something in the first stages, if the points hadn't been abstracted—if they'd been related back at the right moment to the general movement. . . .' His hands were trembling.

'It's the same problem again. What is the right moment of re-connection? What is the criterion of a just strike? Everything's connected all the while, every strike is just. Everything's striving to abstract itself, to escape the copula; every strike is unjust.'

The argument was highly generalised in terms, yet each of the speakers felt a powerful antagonism welling up within, pressing against his breast-bone and making speech difficult. Each was speaking carefully and distinctly.

'Well, how do you analyse it all? Is it a pure sense of social responsibility that's forced you to become a socialist. Is it . . . ?' Again Wotton's voice weakened.

Kit answered the unspoken question. 'You mean that I've got to define my emotion about Jill. I can't just try to snare her with four contradictory motives blaring away in my mind. Quite correct. In fact, I have no particular motive at all. And, in fact, I am not trying to snare her. If there's any snaring operations going on, they're on her side. Now don't get that wrong. I don't mean that she is personally chasing me. Would that she were! I speak socially—of the feeling she gives me of a force it's dangerous to play about with.'

'You see,' said Wotton, 'you always exaggerate things.'

'Well, to speak of plain facts, she's been avoiding me. I think she dislikes me—or at least mistrusts me. When I've been with her, I'm left with the feeling that she talks only as a political duty—to get to know the enemy's mind. I might drop some useful information, or I might even come over if handled in a sympathetic and patient way. Why do you think she and that ginger-haired chap come to your debating society?'

'They like hearing their own voices. We all do that.'

'No, they come because it's a useful contact, a recruiting ground. They're really quite bored, talking with a pack of political illiterates and narcissists. . . .'

He hadn't thought of that before; but his wish to hurt Wotton seemed to have given him a sudden insight into the motives of Jill and

her kind. Everything was done as tactics, as a means to an end, nothing spontaneous and normally fraternal—to use their own word. No tolerance for others' opinions; just a wish to trick them into points of agreement and woo them over to the right line, or at least neutralise them till they could be safely suppressed. But though in working himself up against Wotton he had ended by working himself up against Jill, he felt that the discussion had given him the clue he needed. He no longer felt afraid, abashed before the image of Jill. What he wanted now was to match himself against her, to test out her femininity and find if that, too, had become only a political instrument. He was sure that he now understood her, and he wanted to prove himself right, to unmask her. And incidentally show Wotton what a fool he was.

'I think you're going too far,' said Wotton with his exasperating efforts to be fair. 'I've several times heard her criticise her own comrades for leading too in-grown a life, meeting only their own kind and forgetting how to talk to ordinary people.'

'Ordinary people,' said Kit with a sneer he couldn't control. 'Do you call the members of the Discussion Group ordinary people?'

'I think you're too vehement,' said Wotton, and Kit knew that the charge was just. He called the waitress and paid the bill, with Wotton mildly protesting. As they went, he picked up the catalogue, and once more recalled the Rubens painting of Helena Fourment, and something which he had been crushing down in himself broke through. An overwhelming hunger for enjoyment, contact, bodily release. Odd that Jill and Rubens should be the two forces having this effect on him.

They parted at the corner, as Wotton was staying in Leeds for a concert. While walking to the car-park where he'd put the sports car, Kit automatically took out of his pocket the crumpled envelope with a letter from Harry Manson. He hadn't read it properly yet, though he'd received it over a week ago. As soon as he had glanced at the signature, he'd shoved the letter back in the envelope and put it in his pocket with a feeling of discomfort. But he'd forgotten to read it later; and now, bringing it back into his unprepared mind, he stared as if at a bore who'd got hold of his coat button and wouldn't let go. Then he paused and forced himself to read:

Dear Kit, how like old times seeing your melancholy doubting-thomas face loom up out of the night. I'd wondered more than once how you were getting on. I may come up to Leeds to have a look at the textile museum and so on. The Jewish Literary Society at the University did suggest vaguely giving them a talk—Coldston's an old acquaintance, do you know him? I've been doing some work on early industrial developments—for myself, not as part of the course.

So perhaps we may soon have a drink together and weep into tankards over our happy memories.

I had an idea the other night you weren't so keen on world renovation as when we all sang the *International* passing over the Equator. I suppose you were lucky in a way, falling sick when you did, but you missed something in not going through with it all in Burma, like the rest of us. I mean something that makes it pretty hard ever to forget the echo of that song.

When the news of the Labour victory came through, the C O called a parade and told us that it was the greatest disaster since 1066. He was almost weeping. Anyway, he choked with emotion, and the whole parade yelled with laughter. You'd have thought he was stunned.

I suppose you knew how Gavin was killed in Burma. Eric, too, caught by a Jap sniper while he was having a swim. Dick Baxter was stuck in Singapore when I last heard, but I lost his letter and didn't reply—then I turned up his home-address and wrote a few days ago, but don't seem to have reached him. Doug Wilson lost a leg, poor sod.

Oh well, I've reached the end of the page—as they used to say in Jane Austen's day—so, for the moment,

Yours, Harry M.

He felt his face burning and a scatter of confused thoughts in his brain. He couldn't help responding to Harry's words, hearing again the echo of those singing voices over the sweltering ocean, the blistering decks, but he was also disconcerted, feeling an accusation and a threat of obscure dangers in this call from the past. At least in the form, the tone given to that call by Harry. He went to throw the letter away, then resentfully pushed it back into his pocket and strode on.

On Monday he waited outside the gates for Jill. 'I've got the car ready,' he said, taking her elbow, 'and I'm going to drive you home.' 'You're very masterful of a sudden,' she said with a smile that wasn't all mockery. 'But I'm much too bothered, tired, and hurried to object.'

When she was seated at his side and they were driving through the crowded road of home-going, he went on, 'And what's more, I'm taking you right home. Not just to the end of the street. I'm going to meet your aunt and charm her, and then I'm going to take you to the pictures.'

'The pictures!' she protested, sinking still lower in her seat. 'Don't take too much advantage of a passing weakness.'

'That's just what I'm going to do. Look here, you're always talking

about the masses and the W.C.—the working-class, not the Ladies and Gents; yet you despise their enjoyments. How do you think you're going to find an idiom to affect the people, when half their words and nine-tenths of their secret dreams come from films and gutter-rags you wouldn't lower yourself to look at.'

'I didn't know you were so keen to help me find that idiom.'

'I'm not, but I think it'd be fun to see you human. I've got a shrewd suspicion that underneath you're a really nice girl.'

'It's no use trying to fool you,' she said, smiling with closed eyes. 'What's the film?' He wanted to keep glancing at her profile, but it was risky in the busy road. In her relaxed position she'd let her knees swing open and her dress had worked back over them. She wasn't wearing stockings, and he admired her strong rounded knees, remembering something Aldous Huxley had written about Helena Fourment's baggy knees in one of his stories. But that was the piddling-aesthete Huxley, not even the most dyspeptic of the intelligentsia could have called Jill's knees baggy—or bony either. He drove with clenched teeth, feeling that nothing mattered but the winning of Jill. Her doze, her loose relaxed posture, gave him a feeling of power. She trusts me, he thought exultantly. But at that moment she woke with a start, sat up, and pulled her dress down. 'What was I saying?'

'You were asking me what film, and I was telling you that I don't know. None of your W.C. know what's on when they visit the local fleapit. They just go to the pictures. It's a club, an opium den, a private darkness for cuddling or sleeping in—all sorts of things, but never a place of art experience.'

'What's the point of going, then? Is your aim to join a club, smoke some opium, do some cuddling, or go to sleep? And if you're right that the cinema is only a stuffy conditioning place to make people think the values of capitalism the eternal values of man, how am I going to benefit by sharing in the stupefaction?'

'Q.E.D., Amen, and Abracadabra. Everything you say is being taken down and used against you. Smugness, lack of humour, repellent sense of superiority—you've confessed to all the charges. So for one evening you're condemned to put yourself in my hands. . . .'

She sighed in mock submission, and his confidence rose. Again he felt like a D. H. Lawrence hero bringing the female back to her proper allegiance after her fall into the sin of intellectualism. Stopping at the right number in the street—she had given him her address some time back—he said, 'Now we'll have a cup of tea with your aunt, and then I'll take you out.'

Without any further rebellion she went in, and he followed. The house was small and poky, and the aunt, Mrs Milly Wethers, was

lighting the gas-fire in the frowsty parlour. 'So you're Mr Swinton; fancy that,' and Kit was pleased to note that Jill, for all her political puritanism, had mentioned him to her aunt. 'Remarkable, but not impossible. I found a Visitor in the tea-cup this afternoon. Now who can that be? I said. For I seldom have visitors. So I tried again, but I still found a Visitor there. A man, too, a gentleman. And here you are.'

'Come out here,' Jill called, 'both of you, instantly.'

'It's handier for the crumpets,' Mrs Wethers admitted. 'Yes, it's handier for the crumpets. Yes, we'd better stay with the crumpets. That's another surprising thing. I don't often procure crumpets, but today I went out with only one thought in my head. Crumpets. Yes, Jill, of course we're coming.'

They went down the narrow hallway, into the comfortable kitchen with oilcloth of blue and white chequers on the table and two very pompous china-dogs guarding the clock on the mantelpiece. Mrs Wethers, an old lady with a bent back and hair-net on her yellow-white hair, hurried to rescue a crumpet smoking on a toasting-fork. She asked Jill where her wits were, told Mr Swinton to sit in the arm-chair, and introduced him to a surly grey cat with a much-bitten ear, who rose, stretched, and went out. 'I've heard so much of you, Mr Swinton,' Mrs Wethers went on. 'Won't you use your influence to make Jill become a school-mistress again? It's so much more ladylike.'

'Feed him on crumpets,' said Jill. 'I'm going to change.' She had just washed her face and hands in the sink, and smiled at Kit with shining towelled face.

Mrs Wethers buttered crumpets and poured out tea, telling Kit about the virtues of the late Mr Wethers, who had worked in a co-op. grocery store and who died on the seafront at Scarborough while looking into a peepshow. 'I thought it must have been something improper that shocked him,' she explained, 'for he was a strict teetotaler and sabbatarian, and he'd never get into bed unless I knelt and prayed with him first, no matter what the time of the day or night or the season of the year. But I looked myself, and there was only Beauties of Yorkshire in the respectable sense of the word, with a rainbow in almost every picture. All the same, I found a most remarkable letter from a woman named Ada among his papers in the green trunk, but that was dated five years earlier and referred to chocolates, while the doctors insisted on blood pressure, and indeed why not? Especially as I forgot to mention we'd just seen the Bath Murderer at the wax-works. Albert complained most bitterly about parsnips in his soup, as he had every right to do, for I'd written beforehand and warned them that he could bear anything like a Christian but parsnips and limoleum. Electric bulbs always gave him a pain between the eyes, but in

that matter as in most others he accepted the dictations of Providence and wore a green eye-shade. I beseech you to have another crumpet or Jill will scold me, and once even came home with a canary, but that was before he had his portrait painted with a meerschäum pipe by a colleague he had always considered frivolous till sentenced to five years for embezzlement, not that he really liked outings—a right hearthstone-cat as Mrs Gabain always says of her man, living as she does next door but one, with varicose veins.

Jill came down in a well-cut green dress, and Kit showed his relief at being rescued by springing to his feet and spilling the dregs of his tea. 'Are you sure you're wearing enough woollens underneath?' Mrs Wethers asked her niece anxiously. 'It's a treacherous winter, I can feel it in my bones, the baker's van had a bad skid in Blimber Street, and there's no heat in the gas nowadays, the one thing about living in the country is that you can go out and pick up wood, while here the coal's full of slate as well as costing far too much. I don't really know who's to blame—don't tell me, Jill, I know what you're going to say, and even if it's true, it doesn't help me to warm myself on a cold and frosty morning, and Mr Swinton doesn't know you as I do, be sure and take your blue wrap.'

So they went out, and Kit started the car. After a while Jill said rather drowsily, 'Is this the way to your humanising cinema?'

'All roads lead to an Odeon, but I've changed my mind. We'll go and have dinner at a pub I know.'

'A roadside inn. My, it sounds as if you mean to live up to a Hollywood scenario instead of showing me one on the screen.'

He laughed. 'It's only slightly vulgar, and has no curtained alcoves for two; and if I remember correctly, the jazz-band spoils dinners only on Saturdays. But the place is reasonably cosy, and it's nicely sited up in the hills of night. The drive back is what makes it worth while.'

He had been there only once, about a year ago, with a dozen other students, and now he begun to fear it'd be even more tawdry than he recalled it. Or that it'd have closed down. But soon its lights winked at him from a bend in the hill road, and he drew up beside a dozen other cars.

'Somebody's got money in England,' said Jill. But she let him lead her into the warm private bar with its shining cocktail counter and its white-coated barman whose accent hovered between Chicago and Mersey Docks. And he encouraged her to put her anger into words over two whiskies. 'How lousy England is with ill-gotten gains, the loot of a world, even though it's been badly shaken by the war and we don't see the *rentier* here as the southern counties do.'

'Well, you might at least pay your respects to the north for that.'

'I do. That's one reason why I wanted to come north. My mother was from these parts; that's why I've got relations here. Anything's better than the south with its huge population of retired bank managers and Indian Civil Servants, spinsters whose great-grandfathers bought up the right kind of stocks and shares.' She shuddered. 'All quietly crunching the bones of Asia and purring over the blood of Africa.' She laughed, and he forgave the rhetoric. 'That's a quotation from a poem I wrote years ago. I used to be so indignant that I could only go to sleep after writing some explosive free verse. But truly, I must say I blench a bit sometimes at the thought of what a socialist change means in a land with all that inert and bloodstained mob of *rentiers* and their refined *anæmia*.'

'Good, now you've had your outburst, forget the world a moment'

'Not so easy'

'Perhaps easier than you think' He leaned back 'All right Let's take your proposition. I don't say I accept it There are half a dozen better explanations of Britain's middle-class But if what you say is true, then large portions of your beloved W.C. have got a taint of red that isn't exactly bolshevik A coloration that comes from their keenly claimed share in your cannibal feast However, what's undeniable is that they've got the cultural *anæmia* you call middle-class All Landseers and Lost Chords, Oratorios instead of music, and Naturalism instead of Art. The British working-class has probably got the vilest taste on earth. Not superficially laid on but deeply embedded That isn't a matter of theory It's an observable fact'

'You don't understand how struggle changes people,' she said, looking round the room at the sleek, chattering drinkers. 'But what you say is still true enough to give anyone a headache who wants to see England a decent country again'

'A green and pleasant land.' He pointed at her clothes 'A green and pleasant dress Bring me my arrows of desire. . . . When I saw you in it, I hoped that the revolutionary change had occurred—not in England, but in you The realisation of the wholeness of life' He drank the rest of his whisky and had the courage to say what he wanted. 'Dialectically, my dear, you look lovely, and if I hadn't already lost my head about you, I'd lose it now'

'You can be very charming sometimes,' she said, and raised her hand. 'In the name of Marx and all the Engels, don't say you thought it was bourgeois to be charmed or charming. It isn't. The only prerogative of the bourgeois is the extraction of surplus value and the process of self-alienation.' She smiled. 'It's true I had a period at the age of sixteen when I hated the idea of charm. I used to turn my lips in and

compress them, and I cut my hair short and I wore the most awful underclothes.'

'What put a stop to it?'

'My brother. He fell for a very pretty girl, and I felt ashamed when she was there. At first that made me worse, then I changed with a bang.'

'And you've been charming ever since?' he asked with a smile that tried to hide his vague jealousy.

'On and off.' She laughed. 'What's worrying you about sex under socialism or whatever it is?'

He frowned. 'I don't know. I suppose I'm jealous.'

'What of?' she asked a little sharply.

He leaned over. 'Let's have another and then eat.'

She nodded and, before he could stop her, she took up her own glass and then his, and went to the bar. He followed her. 'You can't do that on me.'

'Yes, I can. Go and sit down.'

He obeyed her, and she came back with the two whiskies. 'Now tell me what you meant in saying you were jealous. What about?'

'Not anyone or anything in particular. Just about your past. Because I don't understand it. In a way I think all jealousy is like that. A man lives with a woman and thinks he knows her inside-out. Suddenly he finds she's carrying on with someone else. What breaks him up is the way she becomes two women, the one he knew and the one the other man knows. So he's tormented, he can't feel safe any longer.'

'But we haven't lived together.' She smiled, and he felt she was afraid of the turn their talk had taken.

He took her hand. 'I don't suppose we'd ever have met if I hadn't started getting political, but because we've met politically, I can't see you easily as just a girl, Jill Wethers. You're all mixed up with that famous W.C. I'm trying to understand and grapple with. I feel if I could only grasp all that's gone to make you, I'd really know where I stand in the hurly-burly.'

She withdrew her hand, but seemed pleased, after all. She brushed her hair back with her hand, smiled at him, and drank. 'It's putting a lot on my shoulders. But I'm not objecting. You know, I do admire the effort you're making, and I wish I could help you. Whatever you do, don't get just declassed. In our world it means despair, and most likely ends in the worst sort of malignancy. You've only got to look at most of our well-known writers today.'

Inordinately happy at her praise, he felt her critical conclusion more or less irrelevant. He was sure that after all he was going her way, and would have tried to take her hand again, but she was leaning forward

with both her hands under her chin, studying him. He wanted to tell her how handsome she was. Yes, handsome, noble, not pretty at all.

'As long as I can remember, I've had a grudge against my father. He was so wrapped up in my elder brother John. I think I told you a little about that before. John——' His voice trembled and he drank again. 'You see, I never thought of myself as the heir to the mill. On the contrary, I felt rather like the disinherited.' He repeated the term as if it represented a sudden new discovery. 'Yes, the disinherited. Father's a man with a one-track mind. He'd fixed on John as the son to carry on the family tradition, and I was just an appendage—not so different from the girls, something that just happened because wives still blindly breed after they've done their predestined job of producing the one and only heir. I wasn't even an insurance against loss. He never imagined Providence could play him such a dirty trick as taking John back.'

'I think you let your father stay too much in the centre of your thoughts,' she said slowly.

'No,' he replied stubbornly. 'One has got to understand. Understand fully, or the break isn't complete. I understand a lot about him, but not everything. I understand a lot about you, but not everything.' She said musingly, 'It must have hit him rather hard.'

'I suppose it did.' He frowned. 'I haven't thought of it quite like that, sympathetically.' His voice sank. 'Here's something I'm not very proud of. When I got mother's letter, I didn't feel any grief for John. A kind of shock, and then a bitter pleasure at thinking how father's plans had been wrecked.' He gulped. 'Though later I felt different—rather bad, in fact.'

She was still watching him. 'No, Kit, you do luxuriate a bit in that sort of thing. We can all keep on finding base alloys in our steel if we fiddle about long enough with acids, but it's the general strength of the steel that matters.'

He was rather hurt. 'How can you trust the steel if you don't bother about the flaws?'

'Of course we need tests. That's a different matter.' She laughed. 'Very well, confession for confession. My weakness is to make myself out stronger than I am. I've built up a fairly cool exterior, which often doesn't much correspond to what I'm like inside. I enjoyed making you feel me a steady implacable comrade, single-minded as a piston. But you rather asked for it. In a way I'm always getting scared. Scared I won't rise to the occasion, say the right thing and give the right lead when people look to us. Not that I pride myself in being so unusual in all that. Every day one goes on learning something. But

no one's ready-cast as a man of steel. Stalin. You see, it's a new kind of steel. Love and steel fused together.'

'I don't care for metallurgical metaphors. Too many bad poets use them. Man's a subtle thing.'

He stood up, reaching out his hands to draw her to her feet. But she'd already risen up. Still, he held her under the elbow as they went into the dining-room. And a feeling of cheerful intimacy carried them on through the dinner of grouse and burgundy, with brandy at the end. Jill at last gave in and let him pay, and they went on talking about themselves. Kit felt warmly happy and yet at the same time mentally alive, brimming over with things he wanted to say about himself, and Jill, though not so effusive, responded. Once he grasped her hand and kissed it on the palm, a broad hand and not at all soft, but he felt that he liked it that way, a strong hand. She pressed his face lightly with it, between thumb and fingers, and then let go.

Then, at half-past ten, she said, 'Time we went. There's the drive back, and I have to work tomorrow.'

So they went out into a night where the clouds had blown away and the frosty stars crackled and quivered. 'There's another rug somewhere.' For a while he had to concentrate on the winding downward road, and he wanted to say so much that he didn't know where to start. She spoke first, yawning.

'It was hell today in the shed. Monday morning is always hell in winter. The sheds are arctic. Steam is turned off middy on Saturday and not turned on again till seven on Monday morning.' She shuddered. 'You can't believe how cold the machines are when you touch them, the straps round the shafting send icy draughts all round you, and the glass roof is often inches deep in frost, it drops layers of icy air on top of you, and the shed is clammy with moisture and cold. Ugh, the cold gets right into the marrow of your bones, and you can't tie ends up. You can't feel the yarn at all when you try to find the loose pick after your weft breaks.'

'Can't anything be done about it?' he asked crossly.

'At the expense of time and money, yes. In fact, that means no.'

'I'll speak to dad about it.'

'I won't tell you any more if you take it like that. There also happens to be an extra draught where I am, opposite one of the electric motors.'

'I suppose somebody has to be there.'

'Screens could be fixed. But that'd mean an expense of time and money, and not having everything crammed in a mad huddle.'

'I'm sorry,' he said. 'I'll see what I can do.'

He was on the defensive again, and she seemed further off than ever.

But she answered, with a return of the gentle note, 'You mustn't. I'm talking to Kit, not the boss's son. Please. . . .'

After a while he felt better. 'Thanks, Jill. I've been happy tonight. 'Is that so rare?'

'Yes. I'm rather a dull dog. I keep worrying over things that turn out unnecessary and unimportant.' His self-depreciation was only partly honest, aimed at anticipating criticism, at arousing disclaimers through its excess, at giving an opportune effect of modest detachment; but he felt it all the same.

'Why don't you come to a decision? That's what worries you.'

'Yet you said you were scared and worried, too, and surely you've come to a decision.'

'It's not the same thing. I may feel scared, but I also feel safe. All the while I've got the party behind me. You've got nothing.'

'Don't be so sure of that.' He was faintly nettled. 'After all, everyone has humanity behind him in the sense you're giving the words.'

'Humanity today is the party.'

He couldn't control his irritation, his boredom. Even Jill's voice had changed. With a burst of the jealousy which he hadn't been able to define, he heard all the other voices chiming in, a faint adamantine echo, confirming her and removing her from any warmth of intimacy. 'You remind me rather of an uncle of mine. He's still a strict Methodist. He's just as sure as you of his sectarian salvation.' But it was his mother, not his uncle that his thoughts switched to—the fight she'd put up for her chapel, and the way Joyce and he had abetted her. A part of his life he didn't often recall. And, recalling it, he felt Jill as linked with his father rather than his uncle. What was the use of fighting and breaking authority at one level, in the family, to submit to it again at another level, in the party? Jill represented the threat of authoritative power because she submitted so completely, identifying herself absolutely with certain political forms and denying the possibility of conflict with them.

She, too, was silent. Perhaps she, too, was bored and irritated. At last she said, 'If you really want to know the difference, you'll have to think harder than you've ever done before.'

'I'm not quite a moron.'

'You're not trying to understand. What I'm talking about is a change in one's whole centre of living. . . . You know, you don't make it easy for me. When I feel that hard scoffing part of you, I get self-righteous and talk like a text-book. And I feel rotten afterwards. Because I know it's only your fear, and I want so much to help you. . . .'

They were now well into the built-up area, about a mile from Jill's place. He made a strong effort to throw off his resentment and regain

the mood of their dinner. 'Don't let's quarrel. At least, not as we're parting. Jill, I do want to argue these things out with you, and I go with you further than you think, and I do like you . . . a lot.'

'I like you, too,' she said soberly, 'most of the time.'

'It's so damn cold. Perhaps that's why we feel all curled up tight inside. That's how I feel, anyway. And I know one thing for certain—there's nothing matters so much to me in the world as having these things out with you.'

She didn't reply, and he stopped the car, halting by the kerb. Then he turned and took her in his arms, as well as the wheel permitted. She didn't resist, but also she didn't respond. He kissed her throat, her mouth. After a while she drew back, shaking her head as though tossing raindrops from it. 'It's no use, Kit. It can't happen like this. Let's both be more patient . . . ' He held her a moment longer, kissing her under the ear and running his hand down her side. But she gave no response, and he surrendered. 'I'll never see her again,' he swore to himself as he started the car off. But when he had reached her place and she had opened the door, she turned. 'Thanks a lot, Kit.' And leaned over, kissing him lightly on the lips. Then slid out. And somehow he felt almost happy again.

Jenson made one of his rare visits to call on his sister. Mr Swinton was out, attending some committee at the Town Hall. Joyce had been staying with a friend for the last two days. Margaret looked in, seemed about to spring some confidence, but yawned instead and went up to her room: to curl on her bed, eat chocolate, and read novels about society girls reclaimed by a pure-souled lie-man driven to violent methods, interplanetary heroines, sophisticated drug fiends with a heart of gold, innocent blondes surrounded by sadists. Mrs Swinton was fussing about in the kitchen to produce a worthy supper, and so Kit was left to entertain the visitor.

'Well, how is your socialism going?' asked Jenson, stretching elegantly before the fire, but looking so dry that a spark might send him into a roar of flames. 'Has it survived entry into the family mill and all the dyeing, ravelling, and criss-crossing patterns and processes therein entailed?' He laughed lightly at his witticism.

'On the whole, yes; now I know a little more about things.'

'Inside knowledge is always a good thing,' He smiled, and Kit had an uneasy feeling of having been caught out in a brag. 'As I've often told you, I'm a dyed-in-the-grain Liberal with no confidence in the Liberal Party. I fancy I'm not the only person in England in that predicament. And I confess I'm puzzled.'

'Why? because your own party is at a dead-end?'

'In part, yes. But it's more complicated than that,' He put the tips of his fingers together. 'You know—or perhaps you don't: you over-bearing young people of today seem to know very little of the past, especially the recent past, if you'll forgive the generalisation—well, you know, or ought to know, that in 1906 the Liberal Party was carried to triumph just like the Labour Party last year. We had 350 against 157 Tories. We set out a fine programme of social reform and were denounced by the Tory Press. Then, as now, the terms National Press and Tory Press were more or less synonymous, though in the provinces there was still a strong Liberal section. We held a majority, diminishing yet firm, for two more elections.'

He paused, and Kit asked, 'Yes, but where's the analogy?'

Jenson sighed 'All the while, now we can peep behind the façade, we know that what really happened was not social reform but preparation for war.'

'That's a strong thing to say about your own party.'

'The facts compel me. The key positions were held by a small group known as the Liberal Imperialists—Asquith, Grey, Churchill, and others, later joined by Lloyd George, who, in fact, took over the Tory policy of Lansdowne. We know now that even amid the tumult of the elections, when quite other things were talked about in public, these men were holding the secret staff conversations and entering into the secret commitments that led up to 1914.'

'You mean to say that nobody else knew anything about it?'

'Of course there were suspicions. But when anyone asked questions in the House, answers were given in evasive terms phrased in the highest moral idiom. Some of the Ministers of the period have even declared that not all the Cabinet knew of the preparations for war. The back-benchers were restive. The large majority of the Liberal M.P.s were radical and anti-imperialist in feeling, and disliked the repressive acts going on in Persia, India, Egypt. They objected strongly to the big naval armaments and the alliance with the Tsar. But they knew little for certain and could do nothing.'

Kit pondered. 'That's very interesting. It's extraordinary how ignorant we all are about these things. But didn't any of them find out and fight?'

'E. D. Morel did, and a few others helped him. But the newspapers refused to publish anything of their discoveries. The rank-and-file M.P.s weren't really much interested in foreign affairs. They were taken up with the issues of social reform at home.'

'You mean,' said Kit, thinking hard, 'that something of the same sort is happening now.'

Jenson spread his hands before the fire. 'I don't know. I am merely

disquieted. My father was an ardent admirer of Morel, but he never drew any thorough conclusions from his fate. Nor do I, if the truth is told. But I'm more disquieted than my father was. Perhaps that's why I gave up the book on Morel that I began from the materials he collected. Besides, so many people wouldn't allow access to documents. All I'm doing is to view the present situation from what I may call the Morel perspective of those earlier days.'

'Does it follow from your perspective,' asked Kit, interested, 'that the Labour Government is really only the Liberal Government in a more matured situation?'

Jenson nodded. 'More or less. There is nothing I can recognise as socialist in what is being done or conceived today. After all, the mines and what we may call certain public-utility industries were trussed up ready for nationalisation by the Tories before the war. The 1938 White Paper led to the Coal Commission and nationalised royalties—Tory measures, with nothing socialist about them. Food subsidies, licensing, controls are all a legacy of the war-time coalition. Labour is taking over Butler's ideas about education. Insurance was thought out by an all-party Coalition led by a Liberal.'

'And what do you deduce of the future from this?'

'That's what worries me. Perhaps it will lead to another National Government as in 1931. We know now, for instance, that in 1910 the two Front Benches were secretly discussing Coalition, though they denied it vehemently in public. When I see a split arriving between the Cabinet and the rank-and-file, between electoral policy and cabinet decisions, I see history repeating itself. I only pray that the result won't again be war—won't be a turning to war-preparations, which if unchecked must lead to war and world anarchy.' He smiled wryly. 'But perhaps my study of Morel has made me a person with a fixed idea. I always distrust over-simplifications, and I seem falling into them.'

'Could you phrase your doubt in more precise terms?'

'I'll try.' Again he put the tips of his fingers together and stared into the fire. Kit glanced at him and then at the china ornaments on the mantelpiece; really he must get together with Joyce to put pressure on his mother and have them changed. Jenson spoke slowly. 'As I see it, the governing organisation, the Civil Service, the top politicians, the newspapers, the big industries and the big public utilities are now rather closely compacted. In fact, they make a single organism, and the compacting is going on today under a Labour Government just as fast as it would have done under the Tories. Not in quite the same form, but substantially the same. What can offset this movement into what is now termed the managerial society, but which I prefer to consider fascism? Not the policy of the Labour Government, I am sure.'

'And that policy?'

'That policy is fundamentally dishonest. It works by deceiving people—handing out obvious benefits, such as free services and some higher monetary wages—but at the cost of debasing the currency and increasing taxation. It's a vicious circle, in which the quickness of the hand hopes to deceive the eye.'

'And your solution?'

'I can see no way out except the Liberal way, the return to the free market in order to counterbalance the managerial tyranny and the deceptions of the Welfare State. But that's where my doubts come in. Anyhow, I am convinced of one thing. Either the Liberal way, or socialism proper, something like the system in the Soviet Union, is the only alternative. Anything else is madness, and I dare not look far into its consequences.' He gave a light muffled laugh, almost a deprecatory cough. 'A timid statement, but fairly honest, Kit. I must say that I yearn for honesty nowadays, like a man crying out for water in the desert.'

Mrs Swinton came in with the maid Aggie wheeling a two-story trolley with coffee, ham, cakes, mince-pies, asparagus. Aggie pushed the trolley near the fire and caught one of the wheels in a fold of the carpet. 'Oh Lordie,' she muttered.

'That'll do, Aggie,' said Mrs Swinton. 'You almost spilt the coffee.'

'Yes, mum,' said Aggie, standing back and bulging as usual out of her blouse and skirt. She tried to settle her apron and got it more askew. 'It was the carpet, mum. Shall I straighten it?'

'No, Aggie, no,' said Mrs Swinton.

'Well, it's not straight, mum,' said Aggie, as if she was abandoning all responsibility thereafter for the carpet, the trolley, Mrs Swinton, and the universe. 'It was straight when I left it.'

'That'll do, Aggie,' said Mrs Swinton. 'I'll ring for hot water.'

'It don't ring,' said Aggie. 'It just wiggles, and so I got to keep my eye on the box.' She explained to Jenson. 'It's high up, over the door, and I got to keep my eye on it.'

'I'll get it mended tomorrow,' said Mrs Swinton. 'I won't ring then, Aggie. Just bring the hot water in ten minutes.'

'The kitchen clock's five minutes fast, mum,' said Aggie warningly. 'Shall I go by it or by the clock in the hall?'

'It doesn't matter which you use,' said Mrs Swinton. 'Just bring the hot water ten minutes from now.'

'Oh but, mum,' cried Aggie in despair before such obtuseness, 'one clock is five minutes faster than the other. Do you want me to bring you two lots of hot water? Oh, mum, if you come, I'll show you the clocks.' She glanced at the huge clock of black marble with a gilt Britannia ruling Time on top. 'And that one's stopped.'

'I'll fetch the hot water myself,' said Mrs Swinton.

'Very well, mim,' said Aggie, folding her hands. 'I'm sorry, but the clocks drive me mad in this house. When I said the kitchen clock was fast, I didn't know what I was saying. For all I know, the hall clock may be slow.'

'Yes, yes, Aggie, that'll do,' said Mrs Swinton, waving her away.

Aggie retreated to the door. 'You won't be ringing then, num? I haven't got to watch for the wiggles.'

'No, no, please, Aggie.'

Satisfied at last, Aggie withdrew.

Mrs Swinton looked apologetically at Jenson. 'Servants are so hard to get nowadays. Poor Aggie is a bit trying, but she's really very good-natured and willing.' She poured out the tea, and asked Kit, 'Have you seen Joyce?'

'But she's staying with somebody.'

'No, she came in half an hour ago and went out almost at once again. She might have told me where she was going.' She turned to Jenson. 'I'm not like some mothers. I don't mind where my children go as long as I know where. Oh well, I mustn't bother you with things like that when there's so many more important things in the world.' And she turned the conversation on to the ailments of scores of relations—cousins, second cousins, third cousins, uncles, aunts, great-uncles and great-aunts, all over Yorkshire. 'But surely, Will, you remember our cousin Henry from Wakefield with a wen on the back of his neck. The one whose wife went mad and hid the baby in the chimney, poor woman. Well, it's his son I'm speaking of. No, he wasn't the one in the chimney, he was at school at the time, a blessed escape. Now his wife Martha's dead. Surely you remember her varicose veins. A duodenal ulcer, wasn't it sad? He's just written to say he's laid up with lumbago.'

After the dinner at the roadside pub, his relations with Jill seemed to go flat. Indeed, everything dragged along at a dull jog-trot. He went a couple of times to the Discussion Group and took Brian along. Brian became enthusiastic. 'I've decided, after all, that I'm an anarchist, and the first need of an anarchist is to talk.' The night that Jill turned up, they argued against one another on colonial policy—Brian giving perhaps intentionally, an effect of parodying her argument for self-determination by insisting that the natives be left to their tribal systems so that they could gradually, if they chose, develop slave economies, feudalism, capitalism, and in the end socialism. 'My own opinion is that, being far more intelligent than we Europeans, they will remain indefinitely at the simplest tribal level.' This Libertarian position drove

Wotton still further into the defence of the Labour Government as the exponents of the managerial society. And Brian insisted on arguing with Jill afterwards, so that Kit had to take them both home in his car, dropping Jill first. What infuriated him was that Jill seemed to like Brian, despite his wrecking tactics.

At the next meeting Brian brought Jane Dacres, the daughter of one of Swinton's mull-owning friends. She was now in her third year at the University, taking Economics. Brian must have brought her along out of malice, and Kit was glad that Jill hadn't turned up.

She sat between Kit and Brian, and all the meeting Kit felt himself wandering into memories of childhood, when the Swintons and Dacres had both spent their holidays at Scarborough, in adjacent houses. Odd pictures flittered through his mind, like snapshots turned over in a boring family album, which yet exert a sort of fascination—a fascination that uneasy jokes seek to exorcise. Wandering through the fish market, staring at trawlers in the harbour, watching the light-house, listening yet again to the story how the Germans shelled it in the First World War, swimming in the North Bay round the rocky headland with its ruins and blue and orange boats reflected in the clear lapping waters, belching after tuppenny drinks of Spa Water under the supervision of Mr Dacres, who denounced the aerated variety, and musing or skylarking through evening concerts under the trees. And Jane always trailing after the other youngsters, trying so hard to do the same things.

But at least she evoked his childhood and youth, the dull tennis games and the duller dance parties, and he felt a nostalgic hunger for something that now seemed precious and delicate and unspoiled in that past. His present self seemed sharply cut away from the boy of those years, with his laughter and his dreams. Cut away with a poisoned blade that left the flesh rankling and the spirit dismayed.

The two families had drifted apart. Rebecca, the elder Dacres girl had married someone with a big drapery firm, and Jane had clipped her mousy hair, changed her gold spectacles for horn-rims, and developed serious views on the New Testament. Kit knew that she had had quarrels with her father, attacking his Methodism as unchristian and declaring that he praised God for his profits and scorned the text about selling all one's property and giving it to the poor. She had proceeded to play an active part in the Students' Christian Movement, and had passed out of Kit's ken. A dumpy girl, broad-hipped and narrow-shouldered, with a large pleasant face; hair parted in the middle; clumsy in movements, always losing or mislaying things. Now, Kit learned, she was gravitating towards the Labour Party along religious lines, having discovered Keir Hardie.

Kit hardly listened to the discussion and took no part in it; he decided not to come again. At the end he happened to mention to Brian that his car was laid up, and Jane timidly suggested that she should run him home. At first he pretended not to hear; but when she repeated the suggestion, he decided to accept rather than have to face a bus-ride and a walk on such a sharp night.

I'll simply sit there and say nothing, he thought. And knew that the same memory would haunt them both. That university dance after his demobbing, when he'd had several whiskies and had chanced upon her bent down searching in the gravel path. She'd dropped a bracelet somewhere. He laughed and tried to help her, and when they bumped together, he laughed again, reckless with whisky and rolled her over on to the grass. He kissed her as she lay in inert surprise, and she shuddered, moaned 'Kit,' and didn't try to get up. He realised that as soon as she got her moral breath back, she'd be full of arguments and refusals, so he kissed her again, and went on kissing her. And sure enough, gagged with his kiss, she was helpless, shuddering and moaning and weakly trying to turn her head aside, and every moment growing more helpless, deprived of words and overcome by the strong simple sensuality which she normally denied and sentimentally diverted. But at the last moment steps came crunching towards them and he released her mouth. They both sat up and waited. The noise was a false alarm, nobody came their way. 'Oh Kit,' she began, 'is it right? I always ask what would Jesus do in my place. . . . It's the only true criterion. . . .'

He felt abruptly sardonic. 'You're a good girl, Jane.' He plucked a blade of grass and chewed it.

'Have I spoiled everything?' she asked in low unhappy tones.

'Spoiled what? Nonsense. You're a good girl, a very good girl.'

She leaned her head on his shoulders. 'But there must be a meaning in life, surely, Kit.'

'That's a big assumption,' he said, and stood up, feeling in his pocket for a cigarette. She was weeping, he knew.

And now they were sitting side by side in her car, shoulders once more touching, and he couldn't help remembering how this pleasant clumsy body of hers, so sensual and so unaware, had once been free of his restless enquiry. He knew that she was determined to bring the past up, and he was as determined not to help her. At last she said in a muffled voice, 'I've grown up a lot in the last year. . . . I've realised that we all have a right to our own experience.' Her voice shook. 'It's what we feel about things, not what we do, that matters.'

'I don't think that I agree with that at all.'

But she was carried on by her resolved confessions. 'I think a woman

even has the right to bear a child without getting married, if she wants to. All the true sacraments are inner.'

'I'm afraid I don't agree.'

She still went on. 'I've been a fool, I know. I was awfully callow till a year ago. . . . It's hard to pick things up when they once go wrong, isn't it?'

Cruelly he said, 'You're a good girl, Jane.'

She was checked at last. 'I'm not,' she said after a while. 'Not in the least . . .' She tried again. 'I now believe that sex is a holy thing. You know Blake says it's as bad to fail a desire as to murder a babe in the cradle.'

'I don't consider sex particularly holy. It's human, all-too-human.'

'I'm sure we mean the same thing.'

'Of course,' he said heartily, mockingly. 'And as I remarked, Jane, you're a good girl. I hope you find as good a boy to help you stop murdering babes in cradles—if you know your Marie Stopes well enough, the cradle stage will never be reached.'

Thank heavens that I was foiled on that night of reckless whisky, he thought. Once this innocent and lustful wench fastened on to a fellow, he'd never shake her off. He'd probably even have to marry her, to keep her in her place and get rid of her.

Suddenly he noticed she was weeping. 'You despise me,' she mumbled. Her glasses were blurred with tears and the car swerved leftward towards a stone wall. He reached over and caught the wheel just in time. Grazing the wall, he brought the car to a stop and opened the door, shaken to the core.

'What the devil . . . did you want to kill us both?'

'I wish I had,' she answered, still weeping, helpless in her tears as she had been under his kiss. He closed the door and walked off.

But though he decided not to go back to the Discussion Group, he suggested to Wotton that he should ask several of the shop-stewards to talk things over with him at *The Green Man*, a pub not far from the mill. There was a small inner bar there, with a table holding about seven or eight, which provided a good lair for a group who wanted to talk or sing. So Wotton passed the word on to Sam Mellors. Sam, Wotton explained, was the local Labour Party secretary who had so long worked on friendly terms with Communists in the shop-steward movement that he always lent his voice to a united-front policy; so far he had managed to get along in his own way, partly by ignoring Transport House circulars and partly by using his old-campaigner's knowledge of tactics.

As they settled down in the snuggery, with desultory conversation

about the latest doings in the mill, Kit was relieved and disappointed to see that Jill wasn't there. Perhaps she had another appointment, perhaps she despised such a gathering as a bit of class collaboration. Her presence would have made him feel even more self-conscious, but he had hoped she'd come so that he could extort from her an unwilling admiration of what he meant to reveal as his practicality, his readiness to see things from the worker's level.

'Ah, Bedlam Day was the day,' said Old Bessy, reminiscing. 'My dad used to kill a pig, and the neighbours came with pennies and had a bit of bedlam and some of the blood for a blood-pudding. Aye, things were blither then, even if the kids had only a bladder from the butcher's for football and balls made of twine for cricket, with a tall stone for their wicket.' Kit asked what bedlam was, and she told him, 'Fry and liver and such-like.'

They shied off mill matters in his presence. He tried to show his good faith by defending the Labour Party's programme as so far unfolded in action, and argued that the new wage claims were inopportune in view of the fuel situation. Why not wait a while? Get the nation through its present problems and then press for all the rises you like. After all, if Labour is in power, then the Nation is practically identified with the Labour Party, if you upset National Recovery, you cripple the government and your own future.

'National recovery, whoops!' said Bessy, a plump, grizzled old woman, who had worked at the looms for over thirty-five years. 'Recovery of profits. Recovery of imperialism. That's what it is, honey.'

'But you can't call the government imperialist,' he protested. 'It's going to free India, and surely that's the key matter.'

'Free India! Whoops!' said Bessy with amiable scorn. 'See any green in my eye?'

Dan Miller, a gingery freckled man with large outstanding ears, expounded Bessy's view-point without her conviction that she had only to make a whooping chirrup in order to damn any proposition. 'You said wait and see. All right, wait and see. The Indians are on the point of chucking us out. The naval trouble shows what we can expect. If we try Churchillian tactics, it means war, irreconcilable war. We get out to stay in, if you understand me. To keep India as an armed base and build on the rotten Indian bourgeoisie the way the Yanks have tried to build on the rotten Chinese bourgeoisie. Look at Japan before you talk about the end of imperialism.'

'That's MacArthur,' Kit protested.

'When Britain shows she's got a different foreign policy from the Yanks, you can make your point. Not till then. Look at MacArthur

protecting Hirohito and setting himself up as a tin-pot Napoleon, all of an itch to start his war. Look at Egypt. The national movement that we helped at the time of Alamein to hold down the pro-fascist court is being shot down.'

'Look at Leeds,' said Bessy somewhat irrelevantly, 'and all the black-market building, with some I won't name clapping telescopes to their behinds and swearing they don't see a thing. But they can't stop their pockets clinking and giving the show away.'

'Look at Greece,' said Dan, resuming his argument. 'The pro-Nazis in power and the Resistance being shot down. Look at Germany. The Nazi industrialist being patched up and the Social Democrats telling Nazi audiences about that vile totalitarian state the Soviet Union—and don't the Nazis applaud! Noske, who murdered twenty thousand German workers in 1919 and armed the officer corps—the first step to the S.S.—Noske stands on the platform beside Schumacher, the apostle of Western Freedom and Churchill's United Europe. Look at Central and South America. Look at South Africa. Look at the U.S.A. refusing to get out of Iceland and Korea. Oh yes, we live in a world where imperialism is exterminated. Oh yes.'

'Give us time,' said Sam, a short solid man with a black head of hair which looked so much of a piece that it gave the effect of a wig. 'We've had to borrow money from the U.S.A. to put ourselves on our feet. Once we've recovered from the war dislocation, you'll see how quick we take an independent line—independent of both the Soviet Union and the U.S.A.'

'That's the theory,' Dan began.

But Kit wanted to get away from generalities about world politics, in which the Left always got the better, knowing more facts or what it held to be facts—while the moderate section were unable to bring counter-facts, perhaps because there weren't any, perhaps because they merely didn't know them. (On the other hand, the moderates often knew much more about what was going on at home, at least in the local and limited aspects concerned with particular reforms or reform schemes or with the actual functioning of the administrative machine.) 'Let's talk of things we know best,' he said. 'Bessy's right to bring Leeds in while Dan is rambling over South Africa, about which we don't know a damn thing.'

'Such as?' asked Dan.

'What's wrong at the Swinton Mill, for instance.' He saw that the others didn't respond, and went on. 'First, what's wrong in a general way. I mean, in matters that can only be taken up on a national level. And then what's wrong in a more specific way—in matters that need action here. At the mill, I mean.'

'If you just want complaints,' said Bessy, 'I'll complain till the cock crows. You go and have a look at the toilets. And what about some better sinks for washing up dishes? Not just a tap under the stairs. When we were kids and made a mess, mum used to rub our noses in it. What the management need is to have their noses rubbed in some of the mess that they make with their meanness and their hoity-toity ways.'

'We need a cheaper and better canteen at that,' agreed Sam. 'Then there wouldn't be so many bringing their own meals in a basin and wanting to hot it up, or sending out for fish and chips.'

Swinton was one of the employers that fought hard against the twenty-five per cent increase on the low time rates, and it's only now he's given in about the piece-rate workers and allowed 'em an extra sixpence three farthings in the pound.'

'Skilled women weavers are worse off here than wunders and twisters,' said Bessy, 'though their jobs need more skill.'

'The whole lighting system's bad,' said Sam. 'There's no north light in many sheds, and there's not enough glass, anyway, in the tile roofs. There's strong enough light over the perches—'

'Why?' Kit asked.

'Because that's where the pieces are examined for flaws, but there's bad lighting where the weaving and mending is done.'

'Haven't you seen the notices in the opticians' windows,' said Bessy. 'Weavers' Glasses.'

'But there was a new lighting system put in five years ago, wasn't there?' Kit persisted.

'Aye, and it's worse than the other. The lights are stronger, but they're fixed.'

'Much too high.'

'The small-powered lights we could move about were better.'

'What we need is a system of shadowless lighting.'

Kit remembered having seen advertisements of such systems in one of the technical magazines. He took out his notebook and fountain-pen. 'Wait a moment. I'd like to note these things.'

An older man said, 'I worked in a mill over by Badley, and they had a strong light above the shuttle boxes on each loom, and another over the middle of the loom, shining right down through the loom frame and letting you see the gear.'

'Why was that so good?' asked Kit, scribbling.

'You could see the healds, the piece weaving and the warp, all as clear as daylight, and the ends through the sley. What's more, there was an extra light in the back loomgate, so you could match the colours easy when picking up broken threads.'

'That'd be a blessing,' said Bessy. 'Here there's only one light over the shuttle boxes for the full width of the loom, and so one half is in shadow. It'd aggravate a saint.'

'You've got to bring an electric torch of your own to sley the ends right.'

Kate, a girl with a broad cat's-face and green eyes, added her comment, 'Aye, and in our shed there's new bar lighting for the menders. We used to have one light for each table. Now there's one light between each pair of tables, and most of the light goes on the floor and we work against the light. To make it worse, the lights are so high, we've got to sit on the table if we're doing fine work.'

Kit was bewildered with all the information about inefficiency in a mill which his father prided himself on as one of the best in Yorkshire. Most striking of all was the fact that the most recent 'improvements' turned out to be steps backward. That's the result of refusing consultation with the workers, he thought. Dad's simply got to agree to a Joint Production Committee.

He told the others this conclusion, and they agreed. 'I'll do all I can to get a J.P.C. accepted. I'm astounded at what you've told me.'

He put his notes away, and there was a hush. Suddenly he felt that there was something they hadn't said. 'They don't trust me,' he thought. 'Come on, this is dry work,' said Dan. 'What are you having?' Kit wanted to ask them if they had any plans of their own for dealing with their grievances—if they were going to face his father with direct demands and strike if he refused them. But he thought. If they don't tell me of their own free will, I can't force them—and I don't want to.

He drew up a memorandum on the lighting in the sheds, after going round to verify what he'd been told, and got it back from his father with the comment, 'If it had been done the other way, there'd be complaints just the same. It would be uneconomic to install any fresh lighting at present. However, some of your points are worth bearing in mind for a future occasion. Thanks.'

He was pleased at the milder tone of this comment, with its implied praise. He still didn't want to discuss things face to face with his father. When they sat together at meal-times he had the excuse of the family situation to keep off shop matters, and he knew that as soon as he and his father began arguing, he'd lose any sense of their working together on a basis of common interest. He'd feel driven back on himself, ironical, snubbed, and embittered. But he was amused at the formal exchange of optimistic memoranda and devastating comment.

Then, immediately after the publication of the government White

Paper on the Economy Crisis, the shop-stewards made a protest to Swinton on various matters. The main grievance was about overtime. Why should some workers, municipal and others, be paid overtime after thirty-eight or thirty-nine hours, while the mill-workers, mostly on harder work, did forty-eight hours and overtime on top of it? And if the management wanted to keep the men working longer than the women, why didn't they concentrate them in one part of the shed? When overtime started, they were scattered about, so that often half a dozen engines were going for a few workers. And the answer wasn't to put the men on the women's looms where they reduced the women's wages. Also some of the women were complaining about low-picked jobs that kept them toiling to make their money. Horse-work, they called it.

Kit wasn't present at the meeting between his father and the deputation, but he heard about it from Wotton. The stewards didn't threaten a strike if their demands were turned down, but there was a threat in the air. Swinton had held himself in hand, flushing darkly but speaking in his best sarcastic idiom. He declared that, though he didn't wish to interfere with anyone's personal liberty, he'd like to suggest that the men should go down the mines where everything of course was now perfect under State control. Further, if they cared in the least for the government of their choice, they might ask their Unions to refrain from the suicidal and short-sighted policy of shorter hours and higher wages. Votes for a pampering Welfare State wouldn't bridge the gap between exports and imports or earn a single dollar to pay for the nation's commitments.

Sam, who led the deputation, was stung into saying that they hadn't voted for an easy way out but for a socialist society.

Swinton suggested that they might let Messrs Cripps and Attlee know, who would no doubt be interested in their views if there weren't more important matters to deal with. Then he closed the meeting with the information that notices had already been typed, announcing the closure of the works from the end of next week owing to the government's 40 per cent. cut in fuel for factories. He called his secretary and handed one of the notices to Sam.

'Will they strike?' asked Kit, trying to hide his uneasiness.

'There's a lock-out,' said Wotton.

'But he's probably telling the truth about shortage of fuel.'

'Yes, but it's very convenient, isn't it?'

London

ON SATURDAY, as Phyl was going down the stairs, she heard Mrs Pringle complaining to another lodger that her daughter Becky was ill and couldn't go round with her father's stall, which meant that he was overworked. 'And tomorrow's Sunday.' Phyl knew what that remark meant. It meant that Becky wouldn't be able to go to Petticoat Lane.

She stopped and waited till Mrs Pringle paused for breath. 'Mrs Pringle . . .' she asked timidly

'What does your ma want now?' demanded Mrs Pringle, who had once been asked to lend a saucepan and had never forgotten it.

'Nothing, Mrs Pringle. I was just wondering if Mr Pringle would take me along to work at the stall if Becky's ill.'

'I'm sure you wouldn't be any use,' said Mrs Pringle, and the hairy wart on her cheek quivered as it always did when she was angry. 'You're clumsy. You keep on dropping milk bottles.' Phyl had dropped one bottle about a year ago, but Mrs Pringle didn't forget.

'Only once,' pleaded Phyl. 'Please.'

'It couldn't have made such a noise if it was only once,' observed Mrs Pringle with a scientific air. 'Besides, you forget every single thing you're told.' Phyl, more than a year before, had once forgotten to carry a message for Mrs Pringle to her mother.

She was surrendering to Mrs Pringle's quivering wart and her indignant squint, when Pringle came out in a dressing-gown of towel-stuff which he had recently picked up cheap. 'What's this, Georgina? Did I hear Phyl saying that she wants to work at the stall while Becky's having her ear operation?'

'I think you did,' said Phyl, glancing at Mrs Pringle, who, however, closed her thin lips tightly and shook her head with the air of a misunderstood woman who stood by her words but who wouldn't say another syllable, no matter how she was maligned.

'Right,' said Pringle. 'Be ready at seven. I'll give you a knock to make sure you get up.'

'No, please,' Phyl answered. 'The Bantings hate being waked up on Sundays. And I'll wake all right.'

'Like me, eh,' said Pringle jovially. 'I just knock my head seven times on the pillow, and I wake up at seven. Abso-blooming-lutely certain.' He beamed and took advantage of Mrs Pringle's turning away to give Phyl a hearty wink. And she was so pleased that she reached the street before she realised that she hadn't asked what he'd pay her. Oh dear, that'd be the first thing her mother would ask. But, herself,

she was sure Pringle would treat her fairly. He was very kind to his one ailing daughter, Becky, who was always having things cut out of her, tonsils and mastoids and cysts and whatnot.

She woke at six and dressed in the dark, and passed through the Bantings' room without rousing anyone, though she kicked against the chamber-pot left in the middle of the floor. Then she went cautiously down, holding the railing, and tapped on the Pringle door. It opened at once and Pringle caught her wrist. 'Take her up tenderly, lift her with care, fashioned so slenderly, young and so fair. Quiet, young lady. Mrs Pringle sleeps the sleep of the just. Don't agitate her into the waking of the unjust. I've got a cup of coffee ready. It's easy to warm up. See, make it the night before.' He handed Phyl a steaming cup. 'Drink, pretty creature, drink. Then I'll go once more a-roving, with you, fair maid.' He bustled round quietly. 'Keep my best nylons at home. Can't take any risks with them now. When the Yanks were here, they fed the black-market all it could take, but nowadays it's more difficult. Stay with me three months and I'll give you a free pair.' He pinched her cheek. 'Drink up and come, or Mrs P. will wake and find us in fragrant delight.'

Phyl didn't understand half he said, but she liked his cheery patter, drank up the hot coffee and scalded her mouth, and followed him downstairs. He led the way round several blocks and up side-lanes and obscure passages, till he halted before a shed, unlocked a padlock, and opened up. Phyl stood aside, still half-dreaming. 'Have a smoke,' said Pringle, offering her a Woodbine. Then in a few moments he was wheeling the stall down the passage, and Phyl followed, puffing at the cigarette and feeling they'd got lost on some dead planet.

By the time they were near Aldgate, however, she felt herself once more in the land of the living. Other stall-pushers were encountered, all of whom knew Pringle, though no two seemed to have the same name for him. Preface, Prong, Piebald Percy, and Pongo were some of the variants that she noted. Then all of a sudden they were in Petticoat Lane itself, moving to the Pringle pitch.

Pringle didn't want her aid in laying out his stock, which consisted of silk blouses, nylons, printed handkerchiefs, knickers. And so she watched the other people with stalls nearby. On one side was a woman with crockery, on the other a man with a lot of electrical oddments, mostly second-hand; and opposite were two men with plaster casts. The darkness was thinning, but the street was still dimly lighted, and this vague mixture of light and gloom, broken with flares, made the scene exciting, as if a whole city was being built in a night, in one of the fairy stories that Phyl remembered in scraps and hints. Everyone

seemed to know Pringle. The buxom crockery woman called him Ping, and the oddments man called him Pong; and passers-by made friendly comments. 'Hey, Pingpong, you forgot the sign: Fifty per cent. reduction of nylons if you're allowed to put 'em on the lady!' 'Who's your new wife, Pip-squeak?' or 'Been robbing the nursery again, Pop?'

Soon there were stalls all along the way, as far as you could see 'From Aldgate almost to Lombard Street,' as Pringle proudly said, leaning against a railing and surveying his ready stall, hands in pockets 'Over a thousand stalls, my *deliciosa*! And hundreds of applicants weekly. We've got to watch our interests here, what with gate-crashers on one side and the police on the other. Five bob a Sunday it costs, with a bob and a tanner for the cleaning-up. I'm a big noise in the Stepney Street Traders' Association, and I know all about the trade, love. There's no profit in it, but I wouldn't change, no, I wouldn't, sure as Mae West's the best football player in England.'

Then, all of a sudden, the day had arrived bleakly grey, and the shoppers were there—or at least the people who turned things over and chatted and moved on to the next stall. 'Watch out for the ones that slip a pair of nylons into their shopping-bag if you look away a second,' Pringle told her. 'Some of 'em are so nippy they deserve all they get. But don't call the police. I don't hold with police. If anyone does try to be smart, just give me the nod and I'll get the stuff back. I wouldn't give a bloke in charge for murder, myself. I'd just wait out one dark night and bash him. No, I don't hold with police.' He put his arm round her waist and turned her round, 'See this dusty window right behind us. In the old days there used to be a woman there in flesh-coloured tights, with her hair down to her waist, advertising a shampoo.'

At first she thought that nothing would ever be sold, but then half a dozen pairs of nylons went in five minutes, and a huge woman with a tiny daughter in tow bought nylons, knickers, and a silk blouse. 'She's getting married,' the woman confided loudly to Phyl. 'So bust goes the money-box. Well, it only comes once in a lifetime, more or less.' Phyl stared at the shrinking girl and saw that she was with child, clenching her fists with the thumbs turned in.

'Oh mum,' she murmured with downcast eyes, 'don't tell everyone.' 'You're not ashamed of it, are you, Phyllis girl?' the woman asked, and Phyl stared at her namesake with renewed interest and wanted to say something comforting and friendly. 'He's got a good, regular job,' the woman resumed, addressing Phyl, 'at an iron-monger's.'

'I see,' said Pringle, noting the daughter's condition, 'he deals in

corkscrews and tin-openers.' He chuckled, meaning his joke kindly, but the girl shrank.

'They've been a bit beforehand,' admitted the mother, 'but where's the harm in that as long as they get spliced in time? She keeps going on as if she's the first which ever wanted a taste of what she was buying before she put her money down.'

'Oh mum, you mustn't,' persisted the girl, and wouldn't catch Phyl's eye. 'Come on now, you've bought everything.' There was a peevish note in her voice, and Phyl decided that she didn't like her much, after all.

That was the most interesting moment of the morning. Phyl cultivated a supercilious manner against the young girls who liked to finger the nylons and nudge one another without buying anything. Pringle told her all the prices, but she was afraid she wouldn't remember, so she wrote them down on a cigarette packet, and she didn't feel so lost whenever Pringle wandered off to have a word with a friend. As the morning went on, his absences grew longer, and he smelt of beer. Then he told Phyl to take half an hour off and have something to eat. 'Here's a couple of chips,' he said, and put a florin in her hand.

She felt thirsty and found a café round one of the side-streets, where she had two cups of tea and a meat-pie and a coconut tart, served by a waitress who looked as fly-specked as the cards in the window. 'I've got the yawns today,' the waitress said, to explain why she slopped the tea in the saucer, 'and when I yawn I yawn.' To prove it, she yawned again, throwing her head back and lifting her chest, closing her eyes and opening her mouth most alarmingly. 'But it's not as bad as sneezes. There was an awful rush the other day, and I got a fit of sneezes in the middle of it. I was frightened they'd say I was sneezing in the food, so I held it right out as far as I could, and a sneeze came on me just as I was serving a plate of soup.' She giggled. 'So most of it went down somebody's neck.'

A frowsy-looking customer came in and slumped opposite Phyl. 'Two pennorth of Gordelpus,' he said, and as soon as the waitress went he winked at Phyl, took out a dirty little canvas bag and emptied the salt-cellar into it. 'They cheat us,' he said, 'and we cheat them. But there's no justice nowhere.'

Phyl went out and wandered up and down the stalls. There were so many peculiar things for sale, as well as the staple stocks of crockery, linen, stockings, kitchen things. All sorts of bunion-cures and a roller for producing imitation wood-graining on paint, a patent needle for ladders in silk stockings, joke-soap that left a black stain, instruments for cutting vegetables up (Give your Chips a Permanent Wave), springs to hold broom handles into the heads (Grips like a Bulldog),

bottles of stain remover, corn-cures, gadgets for cutting the cores out of apples or for lighting gas ovens without having to bend. But best of all were the quacks.

One, selling a general Tonic and Rejuvenator, was making an impassioned attack on cows' milk. 'Ladies now, I ask you, why do you think God Almighty made you the way he did—and a very nice way, too—isn't that so, lady?' He pointed to the shyest-looking girl in the front row, and Phyl shrank away behind a bulky man. 'Don't you agree with me now? Would you like to be made different? Do you deny the wisdom of God Almighty in fitting you out exactly as you are, with all the curves and conveniences what you possess? Speak up, lady. We're all waiting to hear your opinion. Are you for or against the wisdom of God Almighty?'

The girl in a low stammer intimated that she approved of God Almighty and his craftsmanship.

'Thank you, lady, I'm glad to hear it. We're all glad to hear it. Now will any other shemale present declare she disagrees with her sister here?' He stared around. 'Any shemale present who thinks she's been made the wrong way? Up with your hand if you do. Not a single hand is raised, friends. Very well then, any males present who think they could have made a better job with their wife's anatomy than God Almighty? Not a single hand is raised, friends. Yet you scorn that god-given fount of sustenance, the maternal bosom. You prostitute your children to cows . . .'

His eyes roved round and Phyl was afraid that they had alighted on her face. Though she wanted to hear further about Mother's Milk and the Rejuvenator, she moved on, past more nylons and plaster casts of frogs, fat small girls and dancing girls with clinging drapery, crockery and second-hand clothes, till she reached another quack, who was attacking qualified doctors as hypocrites and commercialised villains. But no sooner did she push a little into the ring than she noticed a clock, which announced her already five minutes over her half-hour. She started off to retrace her steps, but it was hard going in the thick slowly drifting crowd, and though she was eased to some extent at finding that another clock contradicted the first and said she wasn't yet due back at the Pringle stall, still she pushed and hurried, and then had a nightmare-conviction that she'd lost her sense of direction and was going the wrong way.

However, she was merely five minutes late when she at last arrived, to her boundless relief, in sight of Pringle's cheerful face. He was deep in conversation with a spiv-looking man and hadn't noticed her lateness; but as soon as she took over, he removed with the man to the nearby pub and Phyl had to deal with a toothless woman who seemed

talking in Chinese and who wanted to take a pair of nylons at half the correct price. As explanations seemed hopeless, Phyl had to snatch the nylons back and keep them under her hands. Then the talkative woman with the pregnant Phyllis came back and put down the knickers she'd bought. 'I dunno how I did it,' said the woman, 'but I took the wrong size. When we tried 'em on, they didn't fit. Believe it or not, they're too big, they must have been your outsize pair. Perhaps I was in a dream and thinking it was myself getting married.'

'Oh mum,' pleaded Phyllis, with swollen eyelids.

'I don't know if we change things after they've been used,' said Phyl.

'They haven't been used,' asseverated the woman. 'She just tried 'em on, till I said that it wasn't fair on Tommy to go to her wedding in things he might take for his grandma's slops.'

Phyl decided to surrender. She let the woman change the knickers, and tried to press the returned pair into a semblance of their original neatness, hoping that Pringle wouldn't notice. Then she saw her mother coming, and felt confused. 'Ah, there you are,' said Mrs Tremaine, 'I almost gave you up. I've been up and down twice already.' She turned over the blouses. 'What's he going to pay you?'

'I forgot,' said Phyl. 'You can't think how busy we've been.'

'Where is he?'

'He's got a business appointment,' said Phyl loyally.

'I've been looking for a cheap camp-bed,' said Mrs Tremaine, 'or a second-hand skirt I could fix up for myself, now that father's on a job again. But I couldn't find anything.' She produced an ornament of two dancing children in a shepherd sort of costume, one of them headless, 'I got this for a bob because the head's off the girl.' She fished about and found the missing head. 'I can stick it on with Seccotine. It's a bargain.'

'Yes, mum,' said Phyl obediently.

'Come straight back after the place shuts up,' said Mrs Tremaine, moving off. 'Two o'clock. I'll try to keep something warm for you.'

'We've got to take the stall back first,' Phyl called.

Pringle didn't turn up till a few minutes to two, his face much redder and his manner even more playfully pompous. 'You've taken to it like a duck to water,' he declared as she counted out what she'd made. 'I was born in a stall myself. Bigger than this, of course, more like a caravan. You'd never think it, but my mother was almost a mudget.' He seemed as if he'd go on talking for hours, but Phyl started to get things together and he helped her, whistling or suddenly saying, 'And the skipper had taken his little daughter to bear him com-pan-y,' or

'That's so, little girl, that's so'—which worried Phyl till she found that she wasn't expected to answer.

They'd had a good morning: almost all the nylons were gone and half the knuckers. Phyl wondered what he'd give her, and how she'd bring the subject up if he continued to ignore it. However, after they'd locked the stall up, he cocked his head on one side and said with a wink, 'Do you think I'm going to bilk you, lassie? You look as worried as a hen that's hatched a gosling out of a china egg. Now what do you think you're worth? A tanner?'

'Please, Mr Pringle,' she murmured

He patted her. 'I won't tease you, angel. Here's a cow's calf.' And he handed her a ten-shilling note. 'Tuck it away somewhere cosy, and if the missus asks you what I gave you, say it was five bob. The other five you can work off by giving me a kiss.'

Phyl didn't know if he meant it or not, but he bent over and kissed her. He smelt beery and his face was stubbled, and she wondered if he was going to be a nuisance. But he let her go and said, 'That's enough, greedy,' slapping himself on the wrist. 'Now for roast pork and the missus. Where did I get the pork from? Ah, now you're asking questions. Come along, prettikins, or I might be tempted to kiss you again. But this is Sunday afternoon and the missus is waiting. Come along.'

That evening Matt came round to say that there was a job going in a café near the Royal Albert Docks, where he usually had his midday meal. He'd found out on Friday that one of the two waitresses was leaving, and the proprietor had promised to keep the job open for Phyl till Monday morning. Phyl decided to take the offer, she'd probably make more if she stuck to Pringle, but somehow she couldn't feel a stall job as settled work, and besides, what would happen if he kissed her on a week-day? So she told Matt that she'd go down to Silvertown with him next morning.

This time she overslept, but her mother woke her and she caught Matt just in time. They went by Tube and bus, and she felt still half-asleep all the while, so that as they came up from Plaistow station Matt put his arm round her and asked if she was feeling bad.

'No, I'm just not awake yet. Sometimes I feel like this till about eleven o'clock. But I'm all right.'

She had a sensation of two worlds, but not in the same way as in Hyde Park after the march. Then she had felt she'd got on the other side of the world which everyone thought was the real one, and which was somehow all a lie; now she felt contracted back into herself, as if she were a small creature nestling somewhere inside herself, and the world was prowling all round her, sniffing and poking and asking

questions, determined to drive the small creature out of its lair. . . . I haven't got a strong will like some people, like Bette, she thought.

They got to Silvertown, and Matt took her to a café in a side-street. The proprietor, Spuds Mulready, was seated on a high stool behind the counter, chewing a toothpick. 'Glad to meet you, miss,' he said, shaking hands. He had two rings on, which pressed into Phyl's fingers. 'Any friend of Matt's is a friend of mine.' He threw away his frayed toothpick and took another from a small glass. 'But if you come here to work, you got to work. That's reasonable.' He had a broken nose and very pale eyes, and he talked without looking at anyone, in an off-hand sort of way, his hair was thinning.

'Of course,' said Phyl.

'Any experience?'

'Oh yes,' Phyl replied, and mentioned the two café jobs she'd held.

'All right,' said Mulready. 'This ain't the Ritz. Hey, Maudie, here's the new girl.'

Maudie, a large-faced girl with glass ear-rings, came out of the back passage, chewing gum, and stood for a moment in the doorway with her hands behind her head and her hip thrust out. 'What's that? Can't a girl have five minutes to herself?'

'This is Miss Phyl Lee——'

'Phyl Tremaine,' Phyl corrected him.

He nodded, 'Okay, whatever name you like. This here is Maudie Parrot. She'll tell you anything you don't know, and I'll tell you the rest.'

Matt bought a packet of cigarettes and went, and Maudie took Phyl out into the passage. 'Double-U on the right,' she said, 'and you can put your coat and anything else in the cupboard opposite. There's a seat in the backyard, but that's no use in winter and I don't suppose you'll still be here in the summer.'

'Why not?' asked Phyl, taking off her blue coat with rabbit-skin collar and hanging it on a nail. She unknotted her scarf and tossed her hair back. 'Is there something wrong with the place?'

'No more than any other,' said Maudie, whose face was heavily and inefficiently made up with a belief that lipstick could transmute her large gash of a mouth to a cupid's bow.

'Were you here last summer?'

'Yes, but then I live round the corner. I might as well suck it.' She yawned. 'Can you smell anything?'

'No,' said Phyl vaguely, aware of a reek of boiled oil and cabbage, soot and damp. 'Nothing unusual, I mean.'

'I was hoping you would,' said Maudie. 'My boy Charley gave me a bottle of scent last night—you know, the new stuff that's being ad-

vertised everywhere.' Phyl tried not to look blank, but knew she had failed; and Maudie went on, 'They say that it makes a Witch of every woman. Wait a moment.' She felt about in the pocket of her brown coat hanging beside Phyl's, and produced a page torn from a woman's magazine. Then she read out in a voice higher pitched than her normal tones, 'Make yourself Irresistible. Rapturous Moonlight and Swooning Waltzes outdone by the Los Angeles Discovery of a Wizard Chemist in Modern Laboratory. Cleopatra used this Love Magic on all her Thousand Nights of Passion. So can you. A Drop on all Bodily Apertures renders you Magically Charmed and Charming. Why sit in solitude and Sigh when a Life of Successful Enchantment is yours at so small a cost.' She stopped reading and asked again, hopefully, 'Are you sure you can't smell anything.'

'There's such a lot of cooking smells here,' said Phyl, and Maudie brightened.

Mulready opened the door into the passage. 'How's it going? Told her your life-story, Maudie? The other half can wait till after the rush. Get the tables set and cut the bread up. Jump to it.'

From twelve to one every day Phyl had to work at breakneck speed, trying to remember a dozen orders and deal with a dozen dishes at the same time. But otherwise the job wasn't at all exacting, and there were long periods when there was nothing to do but chat with Maudie and watch her playing round with her cheap manicure set. She was relieved when she found that the proprietor Spuds Mulready had only one interest in life, boxing, and that he was devoted to his wife, Trix. Trix had been lamed in one leg during the blitzes on the docks, but he wouldn't allow anyone to attend her but himself; and after the café was shut, in the evening, he took her for a walk on his arm. She could walk with the aid of crutches, but hated using them, and spent most of her time up in her room, playing blues records or making a bead mosaic.

She took a fancy to Phyl, and told her later that she couldn't bear Maudie. 'She's coarse,' she said, and that was the adjective she used for everything she disliked or disapproved of. She dreamed of getting away to a country cottage, and her husband was putting aside the money for it. 'Next year he'll buy a place near Southend, and then I can get away from all these coarse surroundings.' The large rose that she was making out of red plastic beads on a panel expressed her idea of all that wasn't coarse, all that her country cottage would mean.

Maudie thought her stuck-up, but added that to be crippled was enough to send anyone dippy. And she used to love dancing, Spuds told me one day when he'd had a few. Not what you and me would

call dancing, but the high-class stuff, you know, kicking up legs and going round like a top.

Maudie seemed to change her young man every week, and every time she was sure that she'd found the one and only, the one whom the stars had promised her and all the love-films she'd ever cried over had prefigured. But somehow he always evaporated by Monday morning, and Maudie showed the world a disillusioned face. 'I'll never trust a man again, dearie. They only want one thing out of a girl, and as soon as they get it, you can't see 'em for dust.' But by Wednesday she had found the one and only, who was different from the others. Phyl wanted to ask her why, after all her disappointments, she was still so ready to believe each fresh cajoler. She hunted this to Maudie, who sighed and said, 'The trouble with me is that I can't bear to see anybody suffering. And men do seem to suffer so dreadful if you keep on saying no.'

Midday was so hurried it was hard to carry on more than the snappiest and most breathless of conversations, but Phyl got to know the dockers who were more or less the regulars of Mulready's place. Got to know their names and something of their characters, catching scraps of their conversation and learning to make a quick retort when one of them threw a joke her way. Matt came to the restaurant every day he was on a job, and generally she came down to Silvertown with him in the morning.

She liked the feeling of strong, rowdy life that surged into the restaurant with the dockers. Maudie was inclined to complain about those who were dusty or sticky from dirty jobs, but Phyl didn't mind. She enjoyed the feeling that these men had come straight from their heavy work on the docks, the ships, the store sheds, and she seemed right in the midst of that work, not a mere waitress in a café without any close relation to the world it served. Even quicker than she got to know the names of the regulars, they got to know her name and treated her as an old friend, and she felt herself a member of this seething, sturdy dock family.

One day many of the customers had been unloading cement and there'd been a spot of trouble. One of the watchers had told the men not to stick their hooks in the drums. 'What business was it of his? And there we were, doing three hundred per hour. So it led to words and Jeff ended by punching him in the ribs. That was going a bit too far, even if he had no business to butt in like that. However, they patched it up, and Jeff said he was sorry and they shook hands, and the watcher said he wouldn't carry the matter further. Then this morning we hear Jeff's being charged with assault. We can't stand for that. . . .

Maudie complained about the dusty state of the cement handlers,

and even asked Spuds Mulready if he couldn't do something about it. He grinned and told her to get a job at the Ritz. 'There was somebody from the Savoy here the other day asking if I'd dispense with your services, young woman, but I told him the docks would go into mourning if you left to serve the aristocracy.' He was joking, of course, but Maudie took him half-seriously. And when he went upstairs to attend to his wife, she slipped off her high-heeled shoes and set about her latest fad, trimming and painting her toe-nails.

'This is hard work,' she groaned. 'My stomach or something gets in the way. Ow!' So Phyl took the curved manicure scissors and did her best at getting Maudie's somewhat gnarled and very hard toe-nails into beauty trim. She had to use both her hands to snip a bit off, and the bit then whizzed away alarmingly. Maudie, consoled, confided to Phyl her ambition of getting on the films. She kept her eye open for all competitions that might lead to a film career, and was annoyed that Silver-town didn't have a Beauty Queen elected yearly; she was sure she'd win it—especially if it was done by voting. Perhaps, thought Phyl, she was relying on the gratitude of all the fellows who had loved her and left her. 'I wouldn't be surprised if there *was* somebody from the Savoy asking about me. That's where all the film-stars and directors stay, isn't it? I'm sure I read it in one of the film magazines. Only a fortnight ago I wrote to somebody asking for a try-out and enclosing that photo of myself as Carmen—I showed it to you. I made the costume myself for the fancy-dress dance at Southend last year. Now who did I write to?' She took out a small diary from her bag. 'I've wrote to so many, I thought I'd better keep a list. Ah, here it is. Arthur J. Rank. Do you think it could have been Mr Rank came down to see me? Oh, I'll never forgive Spuds if he's spoiled my chances.'

Phyl mentioned Maudie's complaints about the cement unloaders to Matt the next morning, and he laughed. 'What does she expect? There's not a single bath or shower anywhere on the docks. A few taps. That's all. Not a damn thing. We've got to change our clothes, if we do change 'em, just where we can, and that means we mostly can't change 'em at all, my love.'

'I wasn't complaining,' said Phyl. 'We've got to sweep the place out afterwards, anyway, and wash the tables down.'

'That's the stuff,' said Matt. 'The boys think a lot of you. In fact some of 'em are quite keen.'

'Which ones?' asked Phyl. 'Do tell me.'

But he laughed and told her to find out for herself. 'You'll be letting your sex down if you can't smell 'em out with your own dear little nose,' he said, tipping her nose up with his forefinger. 'For one thing, I'd be after you myself if I wasn't married.'

She smiled, but didn't say anything for a while. Then she remarked, 'Sometimes I can't understand men.'

'Only sometimes!'

She went on smiling, but she was thinking of Maudie. Such a good-natured girl and so hopeless with men.

At ten o'clock that morning, as Maudie was showing Phyl some old snapshots—mostly of herself in swimming costumes that looked as if they'd shrunk on her large, loose body, or as if she were economically carrying on with what she'd worn five years before as a girl only half the size—Harry Manson walked across from the L.S.E. towards Covent Garden, frowning in thought. As he came up past Drury Lane Theatre he heard one porter call to another. 'The bloody soldiers are here.' And he quickened his pace.

The roads leading into the market were thick with porters and salesmen, but there was nothing of the usual demented bustle of vans, lorries, handcarts, baskets, sacks of potatoes, and boxes of glistening flowers. Under the huge archway of the market the crowd grew denser still, and he had to edge his way slowly forward. 'What's happening?' he asked a tall red-haired man whom he recognised as one of the champions of last year's Covent Garden sports.

'They've closed the entries. The soldiers are guarding 'em.'

'Coldstream Guards,' someone added.

'Coldstream Guards,' repeated the red-haired man in scorn. 'That's a fine new name for blacklegs.'

'They can't say no,' said the other, a small fellow who had to save himself from being stifled in the crowd by holding his arms in a sort of cage round his head. 'They'd be shot if they did.'

'Who'd shoot 'em? Would they shoot themselves?'

'There's always some stunkers who stand out.'

'I was at Anzio,' said the red-haired man. 'Do you think we'd have shot our own chaps when they broke down and a lot of firing officers court-martialled 'em? Some of the best chaps I ever knew just couldn't stand it any longer. They didn't desert. They just didn't know what they were doing for a day or so. But do you think we'd shoot 'em, war or no war?'

'Course not,' said the small man.

'They had to get the Jerry prisoners to shoot 'em,' said the red-haired man. 'Christ, there's somebody else I'd have liked to shoot. They got the Jerry prisoners to shoot down our own lads, because they knew we wouldn't do it. The best lads I've ever known. So don't you go talking to me about shooting and not shooting. Ah, some of those lads had gone all through the desert campaigns, and then they

were shot by Jerry prisoners, with a jumped-up bank clerk giving the order. I know who I'd have shot.'

'You can't compare the two things,' began the small man, and then cursed as someone trod on his foot.

Harry edged his way farther still. Now he could see some of the mounted police on their superb horses. One of the porters wanted to throw something, but the others were stopping him, arguing in fierce, low tones. Harry got near the front line, aided by the mounted police riding into the crowd to make room for some military lorries. A pink-faced lieutenant went past, and one of the porters called out, 'Where's your 252?'

The lieutenant turned and stared, as if the reference to the charge-sheet 252 hadn't got home. Then he flushed and strode on, followed by jeers of echoing laughter. He went up under one of the porticoes of the central market and took out a map, which he began studying.

'He's in enemy country, sure enough,' said one of the porters.

A utility van drove up and stopped beside the officer. A sergeant got out of the back and saluted him. They both consulted the map. The van had a wireless mast, and through the open doors at the back two signalmen could be seen at work on receiving and transmitting sets.

'Where do they think they are?' cried the porter who'd just spoken. 'Berlin?'

'The Russians took Berlin,' replied another. 'Attlee's taken Covent Garden.'

Two military police came up and saluted the officer, reported something, and went off again. 'That van's the control point,' said a tousled porter beside Harry. 'They're doing things proper.'

'Bringing the soldiers in,' said an old man, shaking his head. 'I wouldn't have believed it unless I saw it with my own eyes. A Labour Government, breaking a strike with soldiers. I can't hardly believe it even now when I'm looking at it.'

'They brought 'em back from Trieste,' said the shaggy porter.

'What's that? Trieste?' asked a porter with a broken nose. 'My young brother was stationed at Trieste. Don't say he's among these sods. It'd break his heart.'

'It's no use blaming the soldiers,' said a man with his cap on the back of his head and a wispy cigarette drooping from his mouth. 'Blame them what gives the orders.'

'Well, for once we're going to see somebody else do the work,' said the shaggy man. 'And they won't get paid for it. No portrage and pitching charges for the soldiers.'

'Aye, there's a point. The salesmen and the shops will get the work

done for nothing? Slave labour, that's what it is. And the landlords will still get their ha'penny on each bushel handled.'

'And a Labour Government doing it,' lamented the man with grey hair. 'I can't believe it, really I can't.'

'You nip down to the House of Commons and tell Attlee,' said the shaggy man. 'Nobody can't have told him what's happening. I don't suppose he's got time to read the newspapers.'

The lorries kept driving in, and soldiers in denims got to work under the supervision of N C O's. Their unskilled attempts to carry heavy or difficult loads provoked the laughter of the watching porters and many shouts of sarcastic advice, but there was no demonstration of hostility. The porters had accepted the fact that the soldiers had no choice, and were momentarily treating the whole thing as a ridiculous show. But underneath there was an incredulous bitterness. The grey-headed chap who couldn't believe what he saw was only stating outright what everyone felt to some extent.

Harry grew tired of watching the crowding lornes, the mounted police with their effect of sleek menace, the utility van dashing about, taking down and sending out wireless messages, the lieutenant confusedly studying the map to make out what the messages meant and appealing for aid now and then to the sergeant. He edged his way through the looser groupings on the outer line. Somebody told him that the control office had been set up in Charterhouse Street and that everything was going on just as when our troops entered a captured Italian town.

Harry went round and found a smaller crowd outside the house where officers and N C O's were continually coming and going. A high-powered army car drove up and a general got out of it, gave a glassy stare for a moment at the quizzical crowd and hurried inside. 'He's in charge of the London District,' someone commented.

'Gauleiter,' said another man, and spat, 'Gauleiter.'

'How the Tories must be splitting their sides,' said a man in a torn cap. 'Splitting their sides. They couldn't have got away with it themselves. Why, if Churchill had tried a trick like this, it'd have meant something near a General Strike again. But Dictator Attlee, he can get away with blue murder.'

'It's not Attlee,' said a man behind.

'Who is it then? Charles Laughton?'

'Gauleiters,' said the spitter. 'That's all they are. Gauleiters.'

A porter who had been standing on a barrow came up. 'You ought to see 'em in there. Got maps and little flags and orderlies running up and down with signal docketts, and wireless on the roof, and everyone saluting everyone else. Hell, don't they love it. You can see there's

nothing they'd like better than to occupy old Britain and put us naughty workers in our proper place for good and all.'

'It makes you think,' said the man in the torn cap.

'Yah, Gauleiters,' said the spitter.

'Have you seen the 'Garden?' asked another porter coming up. 'Looks like the evacuation of Tobruk.'

'They've got more'n a hundred lorries lined up along Farringdon Road,' said the man who'd been on the barrow. 'And one of the soldiers told me there's marines and R A F. coming along, too.'

'Well, there's one thing,' said the man in the torn cap. 'They've got to bring in the blasted army, navy, and air force to do the job that us blokes do daily without turning a hair.'

The docks were buzzing with the news of the strike by the time that the noon-rush overwhelmed the restaurant. Phyl responded to the tense, excited atmosphere. It's like the days of the Savoy strike, she thought, only better. For here she was in the midst of it all, and there was an element of tremendous force among the dockers which couldn't have been expected among the hotel workers. Again it was as though a terrific blow was going to shatter the whole façade of things and show the hidden truth. What that truth was she had only a dim idea; but she felt sure that it was rooted in the men who delivered the blow against the oppressive structure which Bette and Harry had enabled her to recognise. In the new kind of life which they alone could make possible.

What worried her was that she never seemed aware of this deep force until it heaved itself up and came into the open. It must be there all the time, it couldn't come out of nothing. And she had the feeling that Harry, and Bette through Harry, understood what it was, where it came from, when it could be expected to show itself, and where it was going.

The use of troops had infuriated the dockers—at least all those she heard talking about the strike in the restaurant, and that afternoon, going home for once with Matt, she asked him if they all felt the same and what was going to happen. 'Most of 'em feel it,' he replied, as they were sitting upstairs in the bus. 'But of course there's always some faint hearts and double-crossers. But the men are sound. They'll come out solid, if there's a call. They've done it before, and they'll do it again, as long as there's dirty work going on.' He stubbed out his cigarette. 'You can't say there's any body of men that stands so solid as the dockers, no, not even the miners—though I wouldn't want you to think I was saying a word against the miners. Dockers and miners, they've got solidarity, they have.'

'You're proud of being a docker, aren't you?' said Phyl, pleased at the remark as if she had made a deep discovery; and, indeed, she did feel there was something deep in it, though she couldn't have put the feeling into words.

'Proud?' asked Matt, as if astounded at having such an obvious thing pointed out, and yet at the same time admitting that the emotion of pride was so much second-nature that he hadn't ever thought about it. 'Course I am. Who wouldn't be? We've got some grand chaps.'

Phyl went on smiling to herself, feeling as if she'd somehow learned a remarkable secret.

Next morning, as Spuds Mulready had to go out to attend to some business, Phyl left Maudie studying the panties and brassières in the advertisements of an American magazine, and went up to attend to Mrs Mulready, who had rung her bell. Mrs Mulready, with her little peaked face, was seated in a dressing-gown and lovely underwear of silk and fine lace. She didn't want anything done, she merely wanted to talk about the strike, which she thought was dreadfully coarse. 'They can't stop fighting among themselves. Men are such brutes,' she said, and Phyl didn't like to contradict her. As if to prove her words, she took up one of last Sunday's papers and read out details of rape cases, cases of seduction under age, beatings of children. She seemed to think that these cases demonstrated that the strike of the haulage men, and the probable support action of the dockers and stevedores, were motivated by mere brutish needs.

'I'm so frightened that Stephen' (she refused to use her husband's nickname) 'will get mixed up in it. He's so impulsive and he can't bear anything he considers unjust. He doesn't stop to think things out.' She took out a box of chocolates and offered Phyl one. 'You're looking a little pale this morning, my child.' She stroked Phyl's face. 'I wonder if you'd come and live with us when we get our cottage at Southend. Stephen will have to come up here every day, and I'll need someone to do the housework.' She hesitated and then said, 'A sort of lady's companion.' She had clearly read the term in a novel or a newspaper's society gossip, and was a little nervous about using it, but having once got it out, she brightened and repeated it. Then she gave Phyl another chocolate and again stroked her cheeks. 'You've got such a darling little face.'

Phyl murmured some vague thanks, wanting to get away and determined to be anything but a lady's companion. Mrs Mulready was watching her keenly, with her bird-bright eye. Then there was the noise of many feet below. 'I'd better go now,' said Phyl, rising. 'I can't leave Maudie all on her own.'

'Hand me the copies of that ballet magazine first,' said Mrs Mul-

ready, pouting. 'Why such a hurry? The brutes can wait a moment.'

Phyl was glad to get away from the room with its thick smell of violet scent and lavender water, to the noisy restaurant with its cigarette smoke and dust, its strong-thewed men with heavy boots and greasy caps. 'The slaughtermen are out, too,' someone said. And another answered. 'Don't forget Billingsgate.' A third summed up: 'Not a man left in the Markets. It's a mass walk-out.' By listening hard and piecing things together, she grasped that a large meeting had been held in the Customs House Fields, not far away from the restaurant, and that there had been a show of cards on the decision to strike. Messages had come in from the dockers of Liverpool, Hull, Grimsby, and other ports. The London Port Workers' Defence Committee had called the meeting, and she decided to ask Matt what that was rather than show her ignorance by asking any of the dockers whom she was serving with tea in solid china mugs. One of the speakers at the meeting had said 'Our brothers have been pushed out from fighting for their rights, and their place taken by troops. Do you agree they are getting a square deal? Then you know what to do.'

'The government sends things to towns inland,' said a docker, rolling a cigarette with one hand. 'Then it's blacklegged back to London.'

'Oh, aye,' said a small dark-browed man. 'Did you hear that railwayman telling us "It breaks my heart to load their wagons," he said. "It breaks my heart." Those were his very words.'

The other completed the cigarette, tossed it in the air, and caught it in his mouth. 'We've had enough of broken hearts, brother. Let's all come out and we'll break the Stock Exchange instead.'

Maudie was a bit sulky at having to attend to so many men at a time of the day when things were generally quiet, but Phyl loved the atmosphere. She hoped Matt would come in and tell her more of what had happened. But perhaps he was on the Defence Committee or doing some job for it; he didn't come.

At last the men began going. Phyl found Maudie on a stool behind the counter with her left shoe off, nursing her foot. 'Some clumsy B.F. trod on my corn,' said Maudie. 'I'll be lamed for a week, and I did hope to win the waltz competition tonight. There was a story I read about a girl getting to Hollywood through winning a waltz competition at Bedford.' She sighed. 'And what with this unholy rush I forgot my pills.' She'd had a small boil on her shoulder and had written in to a pill manufacturer who advertised in one of her film magazines. Now she found her bag under the counter and rummaged about for the pill bottle. 'What I can't get over is their green colour. I've had all sorts of pills, blue and pink and white and black. But these are the

first green ones. They must have something different in 'em.' She swallowed one and choked. 'Oh dear, I've got a funny feeling on my bottom now. I'll bet I'm getting another boil there.'

Phyl went out as someone was tapping on a table. Only three dockers were left: an oldish chap reading *The Daily Worker's* sporting page and saying, 'No, you can't beat Cayton', a young chap who was whistling softly to himself and staring out of the window; and the one who'd rolled the cigarette with one hand. 'Another cuppa,' said the latter.

She fetched the cup, and when she went to turn away he caught her hand. 'Sit down. You're on your feet enough.'

She sat down opposite him. 'We're not supposed to sit and chat.'

'Spuds is out, and I don't think he's likely to sack you for being human.'

'Why do you roll your cigarette with one hand?'

'Because it's harder.'

'Do you always do everything the hard way?'

He grinned. 'Depends on the things. But seriously, it's often handy to be able to do it with one hand.'

She liked his broad happy-go-lucky face, his slightly curly light-brown hair, his slate-grey eyes, his humorous mouth. Seeing her intent gaze, he laughed, took out his tobacco pouch and papers, rolled a cigarette quickly with one hand, and offered it to her. 'No, not in work hours. I mustn't go too far.'

'All right,' he said, still holding the cigarette out. 'Smoke it later and think of me. You're some relation of Matt Lee, aren't you?'

'Sister-in-law.'

'Well, if your sister's half as good-looking, I congratulate old Matt.'

She flushed. 'I'd better get back to Maudie. She's not feeling well.'

But thinking of poor Maudie's corns and boils, she couldn't help smiling, and the docker caught her hand again.

'You can't go yet, Phyl. I haven't told you who I am.'

'I haven't asked you.'

'Don't you want to know?'

She did want to know, but she didn't like to admit it. 'There's no law to stop you telling me, if that's how you feel.'

'Jeff, that's me. Jeff Burrows.' He studied her face. 'It doesn't register. Well, I'll tell you myself. I've won a few swimming races in the last year.'

'I love swimming,' she said, 'but I don't get many chances. It's better than nothing in the municipal baths; but what I love is the sea.' She didn't mention that she'd only been twice in the sea—once as a child of about four, and once two years ago at Brighton.

And she didn't remember the first time at all: the only evidence of it was a faded photo which Mrs Tremaine kept, in which a spindly little girl was pointed out as Phyl.

'You must come some time with me.'

'I'd be scared. You're a real good swimmer, and I can only swim a few yards.'

'You'll grow up, especially if I'm with you.'

'Well, it's hardly weather for sea bathing,' she said, with her tinkly laugh.

'Yes; a dance'd be better. What about it?'

'Thanks awfully, but I'm rather busy at the moment.'

'Meaning I come a long way down the queue.'

She flushed again. She didn't want to give the impression of being a flighty girl, but at the same time she didn't want to seem unwooed.

'Mother doesn't like me going out often,' she said in compromise.

'Well, how soon is mother going to let her little girl out?'

'She isn't like that,' said Phyl indignantly. 'She's as kind as anything. That's why I don't like worrying her.'

'My, aren't you easy to tease,' he said. 'Now, no more excuses. Fix a date. Or we'll make it the pictures if you're feeling lazy.'

'Where do you live?' she asked. 'I don't want you to put yourself out for me, if you've got to come a long way.'

'There's buses and trams and trolleys and Tubes, not to mention motor-bikes. I've got one. What about coming for a ride on the back-seat one day?'

'When the weather's fine.'

'You've got too many alibis. One more excuse and I'll get a faint suspicion you're trying to put me off.'

'Next week,' she said, and when he persisted, she added 'Friday,' in desperation and stood up.

'I'll pick you up here after work.' He nodded and rose. 'Be seeing you.'

Maudie was still considering about her corn. 'That was Jeff, wasn't it?' she asked. She was a bit short-sighted, but refused to wear glasses. 'He's a wonderful swimmer, he's won lots of cups and medals. Was he trying to get off with you?'

'No, he's a friend of Matt's.'

'I've never had anything to do with him,' said Maudie. 'He's too conceited, in my opinion. But if he's your type I don't want to put you off him.'

'Why, what have you got against him?' asked Phyl, trying hard to be casual. 'He seemed all right.'

'I haven't exactly got anything against him,' admitted Maudie.

'But he went round for a while with Mary Jenkins, and I never liked her. She was as bold as brass. And once in the park as I was getting under a bush I found him there with Sally Searle.' She became confused. 'You see, the rain came up all of a sudden. That's why I was looking for shelter. But please don't take any notice of me. There's no accounting for tastes.'

'Oh, I'm glad to know all that,' said Phyl, deciding that she wouldn't go out with this Jeff on Friday week, after all. 'How's your corn?'

'I'll never get it in my dancing shoes now,' said Maudie in despair.

Next day some twelve thousand dockers and stevedores were out on strike. Troops had been brought in to drive meat lorries, and the dockers had at once refused to load. The strike broke out in the Royal Docks without any need for a call, for meetings to discuss the situation. Then the lightermen in the area called a mass meeting for the lighterage trade, supported the dockers, and paralysed the port from Teddington down to Thame's Haven—except for a few men who were allowed, in view of the fuel situation, to transport coal to the power-stations.

That meant an easy day at the café, with only a few dockers looking in. Jeff was cheerfully among them, but she was too absorbed in the larger event to think much about his past loves or his present intentions. The whole dock area had ceased to function, and this cessation of work, which left the ships derelict and the warehouses closed up, seemed to her a tremendous expression of the power in the dockers, in the workers. Something enormously more significant than any hotel strike which inconvenienced a few rich people. And it seemed as though she had been waiting for this moment, knowing it would come. What it would lead to, she had no idea, but she felt it must be something shattering. When there was a street-corner meeting down the road, she went along and stood on its outskirts, and though she was too far away to hear what was being said, she felt excited when the police reinforcements came up and started driving lanes through the crowd to let the traffic pass. There was something at once good-humoured and resolute about the dockers, which gave her a strong feeling of satisfaction, as though everything was just as it should be. 'Well, did you see anything?' asked Maudie on her return. 'Get your corns trodden on, I suppose.' And Phyl smiled, not even bothering to say she hadn't any corns.

All that day and evening she was in a sort of dream, unable to muster her thoughts clearly, and yet filled with a diffused warmth of expectation.

When, then, next day she found that the haulage strikers had agreed to the setting-up of a Joint Industrial Council at which both workers

and employers would be represented, she felt cheated. And Matt, on the way to work, more or less agreed with her. 'The Cabinet wants to shelve all industrial problems by loading 'em on to arbitration boards. The workers will never get any real concessions out of boards like that; and if the government keep it up, they'll end with trying to kill trade unionism altogether—make the T.U.s company unions, State corporations. We had a meeting on this very point last month. That's why I've got it all pat.' He paused. 'But the strike has forced the show-down. The haulage-men would still be out if we hadn't taken a hand. It's a victory.'

'What were the haulage men striking about?' asked Phyl, belatedly realising that she hadn't known what had caused the strike.

'Oh, lots of things. They wanted a forty-four-hour week and two weeks holiday with pay, and there's something they call an accumulation week they wanted stopped. . . .'

Matt wasn't altogether clear himself. Phyl pursed her lips and tried to remember the other question she wanted to ask. 'Oh yes, and who's the Defence Committee? Why didn't the Union call the strike?'

Matt laughed. 'That's a long story. You're getting into deep water, Phyl. Keep your ears stretched wide, and you'll learn all the ins-and-outs of the docks. It's like this. Most of the dockers are organised in the Transport and General, and the officials there are as likely to okay strike action as they are to jump over the moon. The Defence Committee is the only way we can stand up for ourselves. It's not a permanent body, we only set it up when there's a sweeping demand for action. The rank and file elect it there and then.'

'Are you on it?'

'No, but I back it a hundred per cent. Anything else?'

Phyl felt that there was a lot she didn't understand, but perhaps the only way was to listen and learn for herself.

In her newfound trade-union zeal she suddenly realised that she wasn't a trade-unionist herself, and she determined to join the Catering Section of the Transport and General as soon as possible. She sounded Maudie and found that she also wasn't a trade-unionist and had no interest in becoming one. 'What's the use of us paying our dues only to keep a lot of fat-bottomed officials in easy jobs?' she asked. 'Or do you think we're going to strike here at Spuds's place because we haven't got a toilet of our own?'

But Phyl wore her down in the end. Maudie couldn't hold out against anyone with persistence. She agreed to do whatever Phyl wanted as long as it didn't mean too much trouble.

Jeff had several conversations with her, but always with other

customers around. Phyl began wavering in her resolve to turn down the Friday engagement. After all, couldn't people say that she'd gone round with Dave, and so on? She remembered lots of things which had been quite innocent but could have been twisted in gossip. Jeff wasn't so bad, she felt sure.

But what she couldn't understand still was the terrific force that could blow up on Wednesday and be appeased by Thursday. The whole great work world of the docks and the markets stricken dead, and then as suddenly moving back into life. Nobody else seemed to bother about it but herself. They all took it for granted. A strike starts, a strike ends. But she couldn't explain herself to anyone, even Matt, for she hadn't any words to express her deep-going surprise, delight, hope, and abrupt check.

She didn't go to the dance with Jeff, as he was caught up in overtime on an urgent job. But next Tuesday she waited behind for him, and they went to a cinema in Plaistow, and afterwards they had coffee and cakes at a stall. He kissed her good-bye at the station, but that could mean anything or nothing, when she lay on the edge of sleep in her camp-bed, she tried to think over what they'd talked about. But she couldn't remember anything clearly. Perhaps she was too sleepy, perhaps there hadn't been anything in particular said. All she recalled was a certain eagerness, shared it seemed by both of them, and plans about swims in the spring, if spring would ever come again. She had to lie quietly, for the camp-bed was rickety and creaked a lot, and if Tremaine was woken up even for five minutes, he complained in the morning that he hadn't had a wink of sleep. But she lay on her back in a pleasant limbo between sleep and waking, long conjuring up fugitive images, some of love scenes in the film she had seen, some of Jeff and herself as they stood in the queue or walked down the street.

Next morning she asked Matt about several of the men and included Jeff among them, feeling this was a clever way of hiding her interest. But Matt grinned and said, 'Oh, Jeff's all right, one of the best. He's still a bit young, but so are you, my love.'

'What do you mean, still a bit young?' she asked, confused. Why did everyone always see through her, no matter how clever she tried to be?

'You'll know when you're a bit older,' he said tantalisingly. 'But don't you worry about Jeff. He's a bit of a lad and he's mad on swimming. Who wouldn't be if they had his record? But you can look after yourself. Didn't you keep me at arm's-length all that time you were sleeping in Nell's place?'

'I just wanted to know,' faltered Phyl, not at all sure what she wanted to know.

What with the weather and the troubles at home, there wasn't much time left over for meeting Jeff or anyone else. Mrs Tremaine and Mrs Banting had begun a feud over some missing cheese. And then Phyl herself tripped on a tear in the Banting linoleum, trying to pass too hurriedly through the room, and tore it at least another foot. Mrs B. claimed damages, and Mrs T. retorted that in a manner of speaking the Banting room was the Tremaine thoroughfare and Mrs B. should be sued for not keeping the thoroughfare in good order; Phyl might easily have fallen on her face and been hurt. Next the Banting girl Ruby, whom even her mother admitted to be 'a shingle short,' was so excited by the feud and her mother's fulminations that she went one afternoon into the Tremaine room, when it was empty, and tried to set it on fire. Mrs T. threatened to have her locked up, and Mrs B. wavered between tears and abuse.

The Banting boy, lying on his bed with a sports paper, took advantage of the strained situation to exercise his wit on any of the Tremaines passing through, encouraged by hoots of laughter from his mother. Phyl especially he liked to disconcert. 'Hallo, deadly nightshade, off for the evening prow!'

The only members of the families who ignored the whole proceeding were the two male heads. Tremaine groaned and put his hands to his temples when his wife began on the subject, saying, 'Hasn't a man got enough trouble at work without coming home to a bedlam?' While Banting read his newspapers through any noise, trying on various spectacles; he had a theory that his powers of sight changed according to the weather, the stars, the state of his liver, and other inscrutable factors. 'Less noise there,' was all he said, 'less tumultuation, if you please. I can't hear myself reading.'

Besides, Phyl felt that she ought to look in one or two evenings to help Nell, and one or two more to help Pearl Rugsby and her mother. Ever since the disclosure of Pearl's condition, she and Mrs Rugsby had been on the best of terms, and Pearl was no longer a tragedy queen. A brief effort by Rugsby to assert the moral rights of a father and to chastise an erring daughter had been settled by his flight from the house, jeered-at and dishevelled. He was admitted back next morning after abjectly promising to behave himself; but his routed effort had consolidated the alliance of mother and daughter.

'She's not going back to work,' said Mrs Rugsby, as if work was the cause of all downfalls. 'We're going to start breeding seriously. We'll move out into Essex, where my sister lives, near Dunmow, and there we'll do nothing but breed day and night.'

She had added a couple of Middlesex finches to her collection, in a little cage perched on the larger one in the yard, because she couldn't resist the street dealer's name for them: Toll-loll-loll-kiss-me-dear.

'What about Mr Rigsby?' Phyl asked.

'Aw, we don't need him to breed,' said Mrs Rigsby. 'He can stay or he can come.'

But Rigsby, who had heard of a man who was growing tobacco and pressing it for his own use, decided that he, too, had rural ambitions.

'I'll grow you bird seed,' he said, 'and I'll grow myself tobacco.'

Mrs Rigsby was sceptical. 'And if there's a cow that gives beer out of its teats, you'll take to farming.'

Pearl felt sure she'd be happy. 'I want to get away from all this,' she told Phyl, spreading out her hands. 'I'd even like mum's birds in the country. But you've got to come and stay with us. You're my only true friend.'

'I'd love to come and stay now and then, but I couldn't live there.'

She couldn't explain. She felt she was too ignorant to go running away from London, however lovely the refuge. More and more she felt that she didn't just want to get married and drag along like her mother—even like Nell, who was losing her looks and didn't have any interest in life beyond pleasing Matt and keeping her furniture neat and tidy. Not that it was so easy. On the one side she felt the pull of the dream of love, of being all-in-all to someone and living wrapped up in that dream, and on the other side she wanted to be in the midst of things, understanding what the struggle was about and playing her part in it. A life shut blindly away from such events as the Savoy Strike or the Haulage Strike now seemed to her poor and mean; and yet she didn't want to get swept up in such events day in and day out, to the exclusion of that dream of love which slept and stirred and woke and slept again in her heart. How did anyone solve such a conflict? Had Bette really solved it?

She sent Bette a postcard and got a letter asking her to come along any time that suited her. 'Only, let me know ahead. If we're going out, you can come with us,' Bette wrote. But it wasn't easy, Phyl found, to plan ahead, when so many things were likely to crop up and demand immediate attention. And so, though her thoughts always turned to Bette when she felt herself forced up against things, she didn't go and see her. The weather was so grim, and she had enough travelling daily to Silvertown, and she hadn't a postcard when she thought of writing, and then Pearl said, 'Please do come on Thursday,' and Nell said, 'Thanks, Phyl, you're a real help, do come again on Friday.' And Mrs Mulready wanted her to stay on and comb her hair or turn over the pages of dance magazines and put boogie-woogie

records on the gramophone. And Jeff said, 'What about the pictures again? You don't seem to have any time for me these days!'

'I haven't got any time for myself,' she said.

17

Tyneside

'I'M NOT IN,' he said testily as the 'phone rang again; and sat tapping on the blotter with his pencil while Miss Pickering dealt with the call. Her voice took on the firm but specially courteous intonation which meant that she was telling lies on her employer's behalf. She sat half-turned away as if she preferred not to catch Emery's eye while she was denying his presence. As she spoke, she fingered the silver brooch holding her blouse at the neck. She lived on the top of a chemist's shop, in a small self-contained flatette. He knew that because he had taken up a letter she'd been writing to her brother in Canada last week and gone on reading. She had mentioned the flatette, which it seemed she'd been living in for only a month or so—a long and dull story about the problem of getting her gas-meter read, and how much nicer it was to have her own entry and feel quite on her own. There was nothing about Emery. But ever since he knew she lived in a self-contained little place, he had found his thoughts playing round her with increased attention. He had vaguely formulated several schemes for getting himself invited along one evening—to do some extra work. But the trouble was that Miss Pickering knew as well as he how much work there was, and the normal thing was to stay on if necessary at the Union office. Besides, how could he get round to admitting his knowledge of her way of living?

'No, I don't know for sure when he'll be in.'

She put the receiver down, and only then glanced at him. He smiled. 'Crow's again?'

'Yes, they're very persistent.'

He toyed with his pencil. 'I don't need to tell you, Barbara, that I've no objection to work. What I don't like is wasting time.'

She showed her appreciation of the confidence, settling back in her chair and putting her hands in her lap. 'Of course, Mr Emery.'

'The branch meeting last night was sheer waste of time. I didn't even get a chance to open my mouth. Old Jackson was in the chair. He's got a natural sympathy for other windbags, and let a chap from the floor maunder on with a long diatribe against piecework, mixed up with

arguments against an amalgamated union; and instead of calling him to order, he encouraged him. I've never heard such a performance. The meeting was badly attended, and the agenda got out of control through the crank's speech. Old Jackson had to wind it up in a hurry, and everyone rushed out for drinks. Was I sick?

'Too bad,' said Miss Pickering soothingly. 'They ought to know how valuable your time is.'

'And that's the branch which didn't turn a hair when I won the dispute against Wilkins—a decision that affected over thirty per cent. of its members. Not a word of thanks. And instead, I found out later, at the next meeting, which I couldn't get to, half a dozen of the comrades started calling me down and organising a slander campaign.'

'Too bad,' murmured Miss Pickering. 'But you can't expect gratitude,' she added brightly, relieved at having found adequate comment. 'Not in this world, anyway.'

'Oh well,' he said, picking up a letter, 'it's no use kicking. The fact is that the rank and file are getting more and more apathetic. I won't say we were perfect by any means in the old days, but we did have the right sort of fighting spirit. We didn't just want to shoot at our own fellows.'

'I'm sure not,' said Miss Pickering, playing about with her brooch. Her mouth was slightly open and she was looking at Emery with eyes of intent submission, and yet he had the feeling that she was thinking of something else.

'Oh well,' he repeated. 'I suppose there's nothing but to get back to the grind.' And he was sure she returned to her shorthand notebook with an alacrity of relief. She's a tepid fool, he thought, and thrust out of his mind all thought of the rooms over the chemist's shop.

But he couldn't dismiss the matter of Crow's so easily. It was one of those cursed disputes in which principles and personalities had become hopelessly entangled. The management, besides, had come out on top recently in several small disputes, of which the one about the semi-skilled man on the skilled machine had been the least. They weren't feeling conciliatory, and the tempers of the men were getting frayed. But the matter of Benson wasn't, Emery felt, the one on which an all-out counter-attack should be launched; it was too ticklish and involved. Yet to lose it would be a heavy black mark against him among the rank and file, giving new strength to what he called the Underground Movement to unseat him.

Hardly had he settled down to study his letters than there was a knock on the door. Miss Pickering answered it, but couldn't hedge Benson out. How the devil had he managed to come up without being announced?

'Hallo, Jack,' he said, frowning. 'I didn't expect you.'
'Yes, I know,' said Benson. 'It's a bad moment, you're immersed in work, and I'm a nuisance. The Enquiries girl was too busy chatting to a handsome young man to care who I was. So here I am.'

'Take a seat,' said Emery, leaning back. 'I was just going to give you a ring and ask you to look in after work. I shan't be leaving till past seven. You see,' he said sarcastically, 'we bloated officials do some work sometimes—when we get five minutes free to do it in.'

'Now look here, Bill,' said Benson in more friendly tones, 'something's got to be done—'

'Would you like me to ask Miss Pickering to get down the files and show you how many matters there are in which something's got to be done, and done quickly?'

'I'll take your word for it, but all the same you must admit this is a serious dispute. Not just because I'm mixed up in it. That's not why I'm spoiling your official calm. You know that if the management win again, and on such an issue, the Union will get a heavy setback. It'll have repercussions all over the place, not only in Crow's.'

'Granted. . . . But who was such a fool as to draw those insulting pictures of the foreman on the wall? A silly detail in itself, but a bad starting-point for a dispute. It gives an effect of trying to pin-prick the management.'

'Don't look at me like that. I'm no artist.'

'Neither was the man who drew those pictures.' He stood up. 'Let's go somewhere where we can have a quiet talk.' He was afraid that Partridge might come in at any moment.

They went out, Emery giving Miss Pickering a nod. 'Won't be long. Let me see the Davenport letter again before you post it.' He put his hand on Benson's shoulder as they went down the corridor. 'You get my point?'

'Of course, but I can't take it as seriously as you suggest. What's at issue is the management's right to sack the works' convener on a flippant issue.'

'You yourself admit you said some flaming things to old Meadows.'

'Not half what I felt.'

'But you put yourself in the wrong. Can't you chaps ever learn that shooting your mouth never gets you anywhere?'

'Look here,' said Benson, irritably. 'You're paid by the boys to shoot your mouth, and it's time you shot it in this matter.'

'You won't find me backward when there's anything useful to be said. I'm talking about losing one's temper and indulging in personal abuse.'

'Oh Christ,' grumbled Benson, 'can't a chap say just what he feels once in a lifetime?'

'Not if it gets the Union in a jam.'

He saw the girl going round with afternoon teas and told her to bring two cups to the room at the end of the corridor, which he knew was empty. Then he and Benson settled down to talk.

'Look here, Bill,' said Benson, making an effort to be friendly. 'You know the rude drawings and my alleged abuse of Meadows are only red-herrings. What's at issue is the right of a steward to be a steward at all.'

'To leave his work without reporting for permission.'

'In the course of his duties as a steward. To see the manager.'

'Now tell me what good you expected to do, Jack,' said Emery with a weary tolerance. 'Knowing yourself to be as amenable to reason as a bagful of fleas, and Meadows to be an opinionated old bastard who used to contribute to Mosley's secret funds—how the devil did you think you'd do any good?'

'I can explain that at any length you require,' said Benson, 'but I'd like to emphasise that that's not the point at issue. The point at issue is whether they can sack me because I went to see the manager in the course of my duties as a steward. Don't forget I'm the convener.'

'All the more reason you should watch your step. You knew they were gunning for you. All you did was to help 'em.'

'I'm ready to defend what I did whenever I'm called on,' said Benson doggedly, 'but that's not the point at issue. The point at issue is whether they can fire the convener when and how it suits their convenience. Do you see it or don't you?'

The girl came in with the tea, and they sat silent till she had gone. Emery had the time to consider his retort. 'Now look here, you know quite well that they can and do sack conveners as and when they think fit—but not for being conveners. What do you want me to do? Words won't get you reinstated, and you know it, if you can't get the lads to fight back. What's the matter? Don't they support you?' That got Benson on the raw, but Emery didn't give him a chance to reply. He changed the subject. 'We're still living under capitalism, we haven't got socialism just because we've got a Labour Government.'

Benson managed to get a word in at last. 'Oh, so you want a stoppage, eh? And maybe it'll mean more than weeks of stoppage, it'll mean a trailing off to York afterwards, and we'll lose the dispute. Will you support direct action? Will you?'

Emery tried to calm things down. 'Now see here, you know it's a protected firm. What's the matter with you? You know the blasted procedure. No stoppage of work till all other means are exhausted.'

'Never mind that,' said Benson, thrusting out his jaw. 'Will you support action?'

'You know I'm an official. If you're going to take the law into your own hands, why come to me?'

'Yes, you're an official,' retorted Benson, with a sneer in his voice. 'What's the use? Why is it that when our members meet some of you blokes, we feel as though we're arguing with the governor? Some of you sound like nancy personnel managers. Oh, I don't mean you exactly, but how long's it going to go on?'

'What's the Union for, anyway?' asked Emery, nettled.

'You bastards want it both ways. We do the fighting, and it's unofficial; but you can't win through procedure, so we must have action——'

Emery made a strong effort to control the situation. 'Yes, Jack, action, I agree with you, but let's make sure it's as considered action as possible. I'm going through all the material with a fine toothcomb this afternoon, to find just where they've laid themselves open. I'm setting everything in motion.

'Time it moved, then,' said Benson, thrusting out his jaw again.

But Emery, as he finally managed to get rid of Benson, felt reluctantly that there was something in the militant policy. What was the present state of things but an interminable struggle of half-concluded disputes always waiting to flare up again? Benson was right, in a way. It would be as well, he thought, if I went up and really told them. It might frighten them a bit.

But the next moment he felt irresolution again. He couldn't even meet or ring them direct. Anything had to be done through the Federation. There'd be a complaint lodged, anyway. . . . The procedure gets you down, he told himself, and though this point supported Benson's attitude he felt it as a self-defence, a rebuttal of Benson's demands.

He did stay in the office till seven, and he did puzzle for at least an hour over Benson's case, drawing on all his experience of disputes over dismissals. Things were quiet. Oliver and Partridge, who shared the office room, were away—Oliver at Blyth and Partridge dealing with some boilermakers' dispute up the river. Miss Pickering stayed till half-past six, telling him that she wasn't in a hurry, and he felt sure that some of the letters she typed could have waited till next morning. But she went on primly typing and didn't show any consciousness of his glances. As she was packing up, he said carelessly, 'What about having a cup of coffee with me somewhere. I'd like to talk this Benson business over with you.'

'Oh, Mr Emery, I'd love to,' she said, 'but I'm late already. I promised to meet my friend Emma at half-past six. Oh, I'm so sorry.' She looked doubtfully at her wrist-watch. 'Perhaps I could make her wait.'

'No, no,' he said decidedly. 'You go off and meet your Emma. Another time.'

'Thank you,' she replied. 'I'm so sorry. Good evening. Thank you, Mr Emery.'

After she'd gone, he went and looked in the private drawer in her desk. She had some pink, scented soap in a celluloid cover, a little linen towel with B.O.P. embroidered on it, a Christmas-card of a stage-coach inscribed *with love and affection from L.*, a booklet on the Interpretation of Dreams, some hair-pins, an old lipstick, a thimble, a pre-war French comb. In the dream book she had underlined the sentence, 'Dreams often go by opposites, so that to dream of a Funeral is to foresee a Marriage.' And later, 'Flying dreams are often interrupted by a sheer fall through space, which can be very painful and disturbing.' She had also put an exclamation-mark next to that.

He stood smiling for a moment, smelt the soap again, and went back to his desk and the problem of Benson.

'Now stop trembling,' said Jean, 'and realise you're safe.'

'Really and truly?' asked Annie, lifting her thin chin and staring in anguished appeal at Jean. 'I dunno if it was worse to come away like this or wait till morning. He always locks the place up with his own hands, and he never leaves till half-past nine.'

'You didn't have any choice, my girl,' said Jean reassuringly. 'If you and Harry are going down in Don's lorry to Portsmouth, you've got to be picked up at eleven, and that's all there is to it. I only hope you don't get too cold in the lorry. It's a long way.'

'The longer the better,' said Annie more cheerfully. She was sitting up straight, with her suitcase before her on the table. 'I don't care how long it takes. I don't care if it freezes, as long as the lorry don't stop.'

'I'll go and get you an old cap of Will's. It'll be better than a shawl.'

'Please don't leave me alone,' pleaded Annie, her eyes going blank with fear. She began trembling again.

Jean regarded her with anxiety, once again uncertain whether she should have helped the elopement. But she felt that Harry was a good lad; and unless something was done the girl would go properly out of her wits. 'Pull yourself together now,' she said brusquely. 'Harry's relying on you being sensible.'

Annie controlled her trembling with an effort and sank back in her chair. 'I dunno why he does it for me. There's only two kind people in this world, and that's you and him. Do you think he'll get tired of me, Mrs . . . Jean?'

'Stop that nonsense,' said Jean. 'There's only one thing that could possibly make him tired of you, and that's if you go on like that. Be

a brave girl—just be yourself—and you won't have anything to worry about.'

'You said that before, and I try to believe it. . . .'

'It's true, Annie. I tell you I know.'

'Yes,' said Annie fortified. 'I'm sure you know. I can't think what I'd have done without you, and Harry says you're the best sort he ever met.'

'Now I'll make you another cup of tea,' said Jean, wondering whether Harry did realise what he was taking on. Annie was certainly nervy, and needed a bit of attention—but she wasn't half out of her wits as her bully of a father and her viciously virtuous stepmother had declared ever since she stayed out till eleven one night a year ago—somebody, true, had given her a couple of ports and taken her to a dance, but that was all. Enough, however, to earn her a month of beatings, which had finally cowed her meek spirit. Six months ago she had miraculously achieved a love affair with the plumber's assistant who had come to mend a leaky pipe when her father had been at work and her stepmother had gone shopping, not expecting anyone till the afternoon. She must be a quick worker in her way, thought Jean; for over a cup of tea she was emboldened to tell Harry some of her miseries, and he had been somehow deeply touched. They had managed to meet for odd moments and worked out a complex system of messages, leaving notes in a jam-tin in a cranny of the back wall or signalling through the front window. If the vase on the little table against the window was on the left, on the right, or in the centre, it had a meaning that only Harry knew, and if in passing at certain fixed times he knelt to do his bootlace, or stopped to light a cigarette, or scratched his ear, it had a meaning that only Annie knew. Perhaps it was the thrill of adventure, of intriguing for the forbidden, that drew him on, Annie needed no other motive than the discovery of a lad who treated her with tenderness. With the boldness of the timid on the edge of desperation, they took extreme risks, but had miraculously escaped detection.

Jean had taken an interest in the girl ever since the month of beatings, when she'd had to be restrained by Emery from going to the police; and Annie one day had confided the whole story as Jean was giving her tea with a specially squashy cake.

'How fast does the lorry go?' she now asked.

'It's a petrol lorry,' Jean explained, 'without a bonnet.'

At that moment there came a heavy knock on the front door, and Annie began trembling. 'Oh, what's that?' she cried.

'Nothing,' said Jean, herself startled. 'You just go into the larder and get some of the chocolate biscuits I was keeping for you.' She

wiped her hands on a dish-cloth and went down the passage. As she neared the door, the heavy banging came again. Angered, she opened the door. A policeman stepped in. 'Excuse me, Mrs Emery,' he said loudly, but with an apologetic tinge to his voice, 'I have reason to believe that a Miss Annie Royce is in your house.'

Jean was about to deny it and push the policeman out; but Annie, who had followed her into the passage, burst out in a cry of fear and supplication. Jean realised that Royce himself was standing behind the policeman. 'There she is!' he shouted in his rasping voice.

'I see she's here,' said the policeman, whom Jean knew by sight. 'I'm afraid you had better let us in, Mrs Emery.'

For a moment Jean meditated charging them down the steps and enabling Annie to get away by the backyard, but the hopelessness of Annie in flight held her back. 'All right, come in.' And she called back down the passage. 'Don't worry, Annie. Nothing's going to happen to you.'

'We'll see about that,' said Royce.

Jean led the way along the passage into the kitchen, where Annie was cowering against the scullery door. 'Well, what do you want?' She went over and put her arms round Annie, to still her trembling.

'I've a warrant out against her,' said the policeman, undoing a button of his tunic and feeling about inside.

'Officer, look in that suitcase,' said Royce, a man with jutting brows and small, weak chin.

'All in good time, Mr Royce,' said the policeman.

Jean gained some hope from the fact that the policeman clearly didn't feel very friendly towards Royce. 'What on earth could this poor harmless creature possibly do that's wrong?'

'That's not for me to say,' said the policeman. 'There's a warrant sworn out against Miss Annie Royce. Miss Annie Rosabelle Royce,' he corrected himself, studying the warrant. Then he turned to Royce. 'I'd trouble you, Mr Royce, if you please, don't go touching that suitcase. If there's evidence in it, you won't make things any better for yourself by laying your hands on it.'

Royce retreated from the table. 'Do your duty, officer.'

'I'm doing it,' said the policeman ponderously. 'Miss Annie Royce, I must take you into custody on a charge of stealing ten pounds from your mother—'

'Stepmother,' said Royce.

'Mrs Ethel Letitia Royce,' the policeman said firmly. He turned to Annie. 'I'd better warn you that anything you say may be used in evidence against you.'

'But it's my money; it's my money,' cried Annie, beating her breast with small clenched fists. 'It's my money.'

'Aren't you going to open the suitcase?' asked Royce, hovering round and making faces as if sniffing at a bad smell. Every now and then a tic wrenched at the left side of his face.

'They can do that at the station,' said the policeman. 'I'll look after it. Don't you touch it, Mr Royce, please.' He added the *please* in a long-drawn-out way that sounded threatening.

'Don't let them take me,' Annie cried, clinging to Jean.

'How can you bear to act like this?' cried Jean to the policeman. 'Can't you see it's a put-up job? Can't you see that this monster here wants to drive his unfortunate child out of her senses?'

'I'll have you up for defamation, Jean Emery!' shouted Royce in a strangled voice. 'I'll charge you with conspiracy. I'll charge you with abduction——'

'Tell that to the inspector,' said the policeman roughly.

'You heard what she said——'

'I didn't hear anything.' He turned to Jean. 'I'm not judge nor jury, Mrs Emery, and my opinions don't count in this matter. The facts of the case are that here's the warrant and there's the girl.'

Annie began to tremble and sob and mutter incoherent words, stuffing her fists into her mouth. 'I'll kill the old bastard if he's driven her mad after all,' Jean thought. And at that moment the back door opened and Harry came in. He halted and stared round. 'Harry,' Annie cried in terrible tones of appeal, 'save me!'

Harry went to advance on Royce, then he saw the policeman. 'What's wrong here?' he asked uncertainly.

'Take him along too, officer,' cried Royce eagerly. 'He's abetting her, he's enticing her. I'll lay a charge against both him and Jean Emery.'

'You tell that to the inspector,' replied the policeman and turned to Jean. 'No useful purpose is served by staying here, Mrs Emery. I've got to take the girl.'

'I'll come along with you,' said Jean. 'Don't be frightened, Annie. It's all a pack of lies and nothing will happen to you.'

But Annie tried to break away and go to Harry, who stood stunned with misery, rage, and impotence. 'I'll get you,' he muttered to Royce. 'Officer, you heard him,' shouted Royce in his rasping yelp of a voice.

'I didn't hear anything. Come along,' said the policeman, taking the suitcase and standing aside for Jean to move ahead with the girl. He gave Royce a push in the same direction, and Royce staggered, glared, but went out without another word.

"You'd better come too, Harry," said Jean; and Harry, who had been standing in a crouched position with hands opening and closing, made an effort and followed her.

She was still giving Harry cups of tea and deterring him from schemes of waylaying Royce, when Emery came in. A neighbour had stopped him down the road and given him a garbled account of the arrest. 'What's this?' he cried furiously. 'What sort of a mess have you been getting into? And who's this?'

'Harry Martin, a friend of mine,' she said curtly. 'I'll trouble you to be polite.'

Emery gave a savage and withering glance at Harry, who sat unmoving and silent with his arms on the table. 'What's this about the police being here?' he asked, turning back to Jean.

'Royce swore out a warrant against his poor Annie because she was going to run off with Harry.'

'Why the devil do you want to go getting yourself mixed up in things like this? Can't you think of me and my name?'

'No, I can't, if you want to know. But I can think of a poor girl that's never been given a chance in life and now——'

Harry, who had been muttering confused threats ever since the return from the police-station, now stood up and knocked his chair over backwards. 'Oh hell!' he cried and burst into tears. He staggered back against the wall, weeping, with his hands hanging at his side. His head knocked against a colander on a nail, and it fell clattering.

'Poor Annie,' he cried thickly. 'Oh Christ, what can I do? What can I do?'

'Get out,' said Jean to Emery, and went over to Harry. She put her arms round his shoulders. 'We'll save her. No court could find her guilty on such a charge. And we'll ask for her to be kept in custody of the court while you appeal for permission to marry her.'

Emery watched her darkly for a moment, then went out of the room, upstairs. She led Harry back to the table and picked up the chair. His sobs began to subside. 'Do you really think they'll let her go?'

'Of course they will.' She took up his tepid cup of tea and poured it down the sink. 'Wait a moment, and I'll make you a really strong cup.'

Emery felt that the scandal of a police visit was the last straw; he was determined to get away from Byker. He had refused to follow up Clayton's offers of help in finding a new house, he knew that Clayton would like to lay him under a bond of gratitude, maybe even using the matter to put the screw on him at some future date. So he had spoken to a house agent, but done nothing much else. Now he called

on several agents and ran out to have a look at various houses for sale on their books.

He said nothing to Jean. He felt that he couldn't and wouldn't give in till she admitted herself in the wrong for having encouraged a half-wit like Annie in her rebellion; and Jean herself behaved as if he was the one who had disgraced himself. Indeed, she grew much worse after the court case.

Royce hadn't carried out his threat of prosecuting her, no doubt the inspector had deterred him. But he had thrown himself all the more vehemently into the attack on Annie. He made as much as possible of the episode of the port and the dance, giving the effect that only by ceaseless vigilance did he and Mrs Royce stop the girl from throwing herself at every male in sight. He brought up a matter that Jean knew nothing of—a trifling bit of trouble years ago when Annie at Sunday-school had been found with a small boy of her own age in the privy, and stringy-throated Miss Smithers, who had brought this story up of her own accord for Royce's use, gave the court the impression that Annie had been a depraved small girl whom only Miss Smithers's devoted efforts had saved from spending all her life in privies with small boys. Miss Smithers refused to say what the two had been doing, and wrote something on a piece of paper, the magistrate, reading it, coughed and gave her a piercing look from under his bushy brows. Much was then made of Annie's inability to pass any examinations of any kind at school, and Mrs Royce, with a long-suffering face and a jet collar up round her throat, said that she'd done her best, but even her best wasn't any use. The money had been her own savings; and it wasn't the first time she'd had to chastise Annie for having light fingers without a religious sense of property.

Jean, when called, found that she was expected to testify only to the circumstances of the arrest. When she tried to say what she thought of the witnesses for the prosecution, she was severely reprimanded by the magistrate. When she tried to testify to Annie's character, she was told that she hardly knew the girl; and the inference was made that she had been helping Annie to go astray, so that the less she said the better. In fact, she was lucky not to be facing a charge of her own. She was told to stand down after she attempted another fierce denunciation of Royce.

Harry also had almost been charged; and in court he stood wild-eyed and stammering, torn between terror and impotent rage. The magistrate warned him to behave better in future, or he would soon find himself in the dock and not the witness-stand. Annie herself could say nothing at all. She stared in mute agony, and only when Harry was told to stand down did she open her mouth, giving an inarticulate cry

and fainting. Her behaviour irritated the magistrate, who suggested that she was either malicious or imbecile. After which the Clerk had a word with him, and he coughed, calling the medical expert, a portly pompous man, who said that without a doubt the mental age of the prisoner was five years and that he did not consider her fit to be left loose. He had discussed her with her parents, and they agreed she would be best in an institution, he had certified her as a mental defective, and Mr Royce had signed the necessary form.

The magistrate accordingly directed that she should be detained as a mental defective and put in some suitable institution.

Jean had at once gone to a solicitor and instructed him to do all he could to get the order withdrawn, but though he agreed to carry out her instructions, he gave her little hope that they'd be of use. 'The doctor's evidence and the parents' agreement would be quite enough without the magistrate's decision. Now that he has given that decision and found her guilty of a criminal offence, nothing whatever can be done.' A rounded pink-faced man with the cord of an amplifier trailing from his right ear, he was evidently pleased with the precision of his statement, and expected Jean to be pleased too.

'But she's no more mentally defective than you are,' said Jean. 'She's merely frightened of that vile father of hers, and the one thing needed to restore her faith in herself is the affection of this lad Harry.'

'You may very well be right, Mrs Emery, but in law all that is irrelevant,' the solicitor replied amiably, still delighted at the legal simplicity of the issue. 'The detention order is made for a year. It may then lapse or be renewed for a year. After that it is reconsidered only once every five years. The Board of Control is, on the whole, very conservative in its judgments. Whether that is to be commended or not, I have no views. The matter is a highly technical one. But, as a point of fact, I must warn you that the Board does not easily give up a defective who has come under its control. No doubt that is how it interprets its function as a guardian of the public.'

'I'd give it guardian of the public!' said Jean. 'I tell you, Annie isn't a defective.'

'She's a defective in the eyes of the law.'

'That's what we've got to undo.'

'As your legal adviser, Mrs Emery, I must repeat once more that it is extremely hard, if not impossible, to reverse such an order.'

'If I got hold of a sane doctor and had her examined, would that help?'

'Very little, at this stage. It might later on. But I repeat, Mrs Emery, the Board is highly conservative in its decisions.'

'Well, what can be done?'

'When Miss Royce is within three months of the age of twenty-one, she will be brought before Visiting Justices. If you are then still interested in the case, you can apply to be represented.' He hesitated. 'Excuse me, Mrs Emery, you are neither parent nor guardian. You have no legal position in the matter at all.'

'You mean to say that Anne will go on being detained as a defective all her life.'

'It is possible. On the other hand, the Board or the Visiting Justices may decide to rescind the order.'

Jean could get no more than that out of the solicitor, though he agreed to make inquiries and find out what was actually being done with the girl. 'If it is possible, Mrs Emery.'

Emery found it intolerable that this affair should make Jean resentfully treat him as if he was to blame for what had happened. Away from Jean, he rehearsed arguments against her injustice, her bad temper, and demanded that she should find some wifely *modus vivendi* or realise she was trampling on the marriage contract. But in her presence he felt subdued by her deep, smouldering anger and merely made some sarcastic comment on her notions of running a house. He came home late and went straight to bed.

He had a feeling that Miss Pickering was aware of his disturbed home-life and wanted to offer him sympathy; but he had not again suggested a cup of coffee after office hours. For the moment his bitterness against Jean seemed to tie him up close with her, make it doubly difficult for him to turn away and achieve any other relationship. But he reviewed the various times when he could have been unfaithful or when he was sure that he could, and swore at himself for a soft fool. Particularly he was annoyed at not having followed the York barmaid. And at such moments of meditation he found his glance settling more and more in the small of Miss Pickering's back or on her quite shapely ankles.

He felt he was losing grip on his work, and tiresome matters such as that of Crow's he felt an insuperable wish to shove aside, to ignore. The haulage strike had threatened for a moment to cause trouble—in General Carriers and the Co-op Wholesale, but the quick settlement had prevented any repercussions. Though the A.E.U. hadn't been involved, the strike worried Emery and increased his feeling of confusion. One afternoon, when Miss Pickering was out of the room, he answered the telephone and found himself talking to Meadows, the managing director of Crow's.

'I'm glad to have caught you, Mr Emery. Are you free for a short while this afternoon?'

'A very short while . . . perhaps. What's wrong?'

'Nothing's wrong, I hope. On the contrary, I think we can settle that dispute over Benson—you'll remember he was dismissed for rudeness and absence without leave from the shop.'

'Yes, of course I remember the case. What of it?'

'I believe that we can reach a compromise agreement. It would help matters very much if you would come over.'

'All right. In half an hour.'

I'm weakening, he thought, it's the continual drag of Jean on my mind. But at the same time he did want to get rid of the Benson dispute. It wasn't so much the dispute itself as its relation to his position in the Union, the next crucial ballot, the intrigue which he felt was going on all the while against him. If only he won at the next election of officers, he'd be well dug-in, securely tied up with all sorts of interests in the Union itself, in the Labour Party, in the Town Council.

He bumped into Miss Pickering in the doorway. 'I'm going over to Crow's,' and smiled at her look of surprise. His feeling of decisive action lasted, indeed, till he was shown into Meadows's office. But the moment he looked round and saw that there were no representatives of the workers present, he knew he had made a mistake not to enquire more fully over the 'phone. Nor was there a Federation representative. At the same time he didn't want to give his malaise away, to ask if any shop-stewards would come along in a few minutes; and he felt himself sinking under the sense of paralysis which had been weighing on him since the break with Jean grew at all definite. He didn't want to say, 'I thought it was a Works Committee or something of the sort; good-bye, Mr Meadows.'

Meadows was there, ponderous, red-faced, oozing over his collar, which yet looked immaculate, and the personnel manager Wystan with his big horn-rimmed spectacles and his check suit, and Hargreaves the sleek under-manager with his Oxford accent overlaid on a Geordie tang. And someone else, a heavy-jowled man whom Emery thought he recognised, and who was introduced as Sir William. Of course, Sir William Burton, who had the controlling interest in Crow's and many other engineering firms, and whom Emery had met once at a session of the Tyne Improvement Commission; Emery had been present to make some representations on behalf of the Union. From discreet gossip Emery knew that Sir William had a finger, and a large finger at that, in the scheme for the Tyne tunnel, which the Commission was operating. Not in the direct scheme itself, but in related secondary matters from which anyone with considerable capital, unscrupulous energy, and early knowledge of the scheme's ramifications could gain huge profits.

Emery at once felt flattered, for Sir William gave him what was clearly meant as an amiable smile and muttered, 'Met before, yes, Emery, take a seat.' But he was also more scared than ever.

'We want to get this Benson dispute settled,' said Meadows with the insinuating manner he could use when necessary. 'As a matter of principle, Sir William has kindly spared us some of his most valuable time. Not because the dispute is in itself important, but because of the matter of principle.'

He paused and looked at Sir William, who muttered, as if grudging unnecessary words, 'Yes, get on, Meadows'

'This is a very informal meeting,' Meadows went on, 'and we've paid you the compliment,' he smiled at Emery, 'of thinking that you wouldn't mind the informality if the result is good for all concerned. However, if you would like the Federation representative to be present, I can give him a ring . . .'

'You needn't bother,' said Emery, not wanting to make the meeting any more definite than it already was. His brain seemed stupefied for the moment, he couldn't decide whether it would be better to insist on a correct kind of meeting, or to accept the pretence of informality and get away before anything developed. 'I must go in a moment'

'I don't need to tell you, Emery,' said Meadows, dropping the Mister after the example set by Sir William, 'that we're not afraid of a closure at the works at the moment. We shall probably have to close, anyway, soon if something doesn't happen in the fuel situation. The men are already grumbling at having insufficient heating in the shops. But this dispute has been dragging on, and we want it settled as a matter of principle.' This time, after pausing, he looked at Emery.

'Yes,' said Emery. 'It would be to the advantage of all concerned to find an equitable solution.'

Meadows nodded and smiled happily. 'Then you'll be glad to hear, Emery, that we have found that equitable solution.' He looked admiringly at Sir William. 'Or perhaps it would be more precise to say that Sir William has found it.'

'Have the men accepted it?'

'Not yet, but they obviously will, as soon as they've heard it.'

Emery replied, wishing he had the courage to rise and go, 'Then why is my presence required here?' He felt Sir William's glazed yet still sharp blue-grey eyes upon his face.

'We all thought it would be more satisfactory if you were here,' said Meadows as if bestowing a favour on Emery. 'Sir William particularly favoured it.'

Emery's intuition, his whole store of experience in trade disputes, told him that these men were setting a trap; and yet something in him,

the part which accepted and riveted the paralytic pressure on his will, didn't want to resist. I'll go on playing their game as far as it suits me, and then I'll turn everything back on them. Who do they think I am, to be caught with this sort of baby-talk? 'It would help to save time,' he said with a deliberate touch of bluffness, 'if you said exactly what you have in mind.'

'A compromise of course,' said Meadows triumphantly. 'We will compromise if the men compromise. What more can you ask?' He glanced at Emery, who didn't reply, then went on: 'We will agree to take Benson back. That is our compromise. But he must step down from his position as convener. That is the men's compromise.'

'That won't stop claims being made for a wage increase,' said Emery. 'If the District agrees with the claims, I'll soon be here, I am afraid, setting out the arguments you've had to hear on the spot from Benson.'

'Of course, of course,' said Meadows airily. 'If you have to do that as part of your duty, we shall be ready to meet you and discuss things. You can't say that we here have ever been obstructive in refusing to meet the accredited representatives of the men, the union officials. We may chafe at times under the demagogic practices that certain ambitious shop-stewards carry out; but, Mr. Emery, now . . .' He made a large gesture of deprecation, to imply that Emery shouldn't object since the aim of the ambitious stewards was obviously to wrest his job from him.

'Well, what next step do you propose?' asked Emery, wondering if his arrival at the works had been noted. He had come straight through to the main offices, and if he went straight out again, surely no one need know of this visit of his.

'We propose to call a mass meeting of the men, in the car-park, and explain that the dispute has been settled.'

'But it hasn't been settled.'

'It will be.'

'I'm glad you think so.' At last he rose. 'Well, I hope your ideas prove correct—'

'Oh, but you're coming with us, Emery,' said Meadows.

'Naturally. Why not?' asked Sir William. 'We're not asking you to force the men to accept the compromise. That's for them to decide. But you have now discussed the terms with us, Emery, and you can scarcely object to aiding in their conveyance to the men?' He scowled, as if annoyed at Emery for having made him deliver so long a statement, and took out a cigar-case, offering it all round. The others refused with thanks, and Sir William bit the end off one of his Havana cigars and lighted it with ritualistic care.

Emery tried to think hard, to balance the pros and cons. How much would he gain by pleasing Sir William? How much would he lose by appearing before the workers at Sir William's side? 'Thank you very much, Sir William,' he said, 'but perhaps you over-rate my importance in this business. In any event, I have several pressing matters waiting for me at the office—'

'The works have stopped,' said Meadows. 'We'd better go now.'

Sir William and the others rose. Meadows took Emery's arm. 'We should be very obliged if you can spare the time. . . .' He guided Emery out and down the corridor. Emery felt carried along by forces beyond his control. As he stood with Meadows on the steps of the building, he saw the workers pouring from the various sheds and making for the car-park. To go past them now would probably have an even worse effect than being seen openly in the management's company; it would look as if he had betrayed their interests and then tried to slink away. Whatever happened, he was now in for it. And he knew that he had been fated to fall into a mess the moment he accepted Meadows's invitation.

They strolled over to the steps at one side of the car-park; and Emery kept his eyes turned away from the gathering workers, who were noisily talking and calling to one another. All the while Meadows was explaining something, but none of his words penetrated Emery's brain. Sir William took a last draw and threw the three-quarters of his cigar away. They went up the steps to the landing which provided a sort of pulpit from which to address the meeting, and Emery stood back against the wall. Now it was impossible any longer to keep his eyes from the workers below, but still he didn't look them in the face. He stared out over the heads at a lorry standing near the gates, and felt the sweat chilling on his brow.

As he learned later, within five minutes of his entry into the main office block, the news was being carried throughout the works. By the time the loud-speakers announced the meeting in the car-park, almost everyone in Crow's had heard of Emery bustling in to see Meadows, and so his presence with the management was no surprise. But all the same, it evoked murmurs, nudges, glances. And now, standing there behind Sir William, wanting to look inconspicuous and yet afraid of seeming to shrink, he felt the sharp blend of curiosity and scorn in the eyes of the hundreds of workers, men and women. Well, it's done now, he thought, and tried to pacify his mind with a stoical acceptance, as Meadows opened the meeting. Whatever happens, he swore to himself, I won't speak. If Meadows tries to announce me as a speaker, I'll say outright that I'm only observing the situation and that

I consider the men and women of the works should decide the matter from their knowledge of the works' conditions. And yet he knew that any such effort to disclaim responsibility would show up badly and would give away the fact that he hadn't effectively carried the dispute forward and got at grips with it. Whichever course he took, Benson would use it against him, the blasted red.

V The Testing Time

18

Lancashire

NEWS OF THE STEPS taken by the government came over the air or in the papers. Ban on ship's coal, coal debates in the House, industry divided into three main areas, power-stops in London, the North, the Midlands, queues for coal, and Shinwell's Council of Action. More big cuts, and soldiers brought in to help. The leaving on of lights declared illegal. And what's this? Miner's fighting the drifts to reach work. That's us. More factories and mills and yards shut down, queues at the unemployment exchanges.

'Shinwell's Council of Action,' remarked an old miner. 'Eh, remember the Councils of Action in 1920. They were something different. All over England, to stop the war against the Soviet Union.' He stared at one of the young men. 'Do you know aught of that? I'll lay a pound you don't. All over England in August 1920. And what did Lloyd George do?' He squealed like a stuck pig. Soviets, he said, these Councils of Action are Soviets. And he stopped the war against Russia, double quick. He spat. 'Shinwell's Council isn't likely to be called a Soviet, eh?'

The Union summoned a pit-head meeting, and appealed to the miners not to let the government down. The miners listened sympathetically, but with a certain wry pleasure. Whenever the country's in a fix, what a lot of soft-soaping we get.

Frank Wilson spoke. 'The government's facing a test. Old Father Winter has put 'em on a spot. You can't talk of the Inevitability of Gradualness to an Avalanche. It's on us, brothers. There's two ways out of this situation, the capitalist way and the socialist way. More power to the monopolists or more power to the workers. And it's up to us to see it's the socialist way they take.' He called for all support for the production drive, but at the same time for the decisive swing of the workers into control of production. 'We've got a good chance here. The management is friendly, not like some pits I could mention—and not very far away from here either. Let's set an example to the working-class of Britain.'

He then made several suggestions for increasing output—the reorganisation of the filling of little trams, the chocking system on A.9s, the use of 14's loading-point to deal with all Top Hard output; and

asked why the Martindale masks, already delivered, hadn't been handed out to the men in the dust-crusher room. In addition, he outlined ways in which the men's representatives on the Joint Consultative Committee could take proposals from the men direct to the management.

He ended with a warning note 'But don't let's think we'll get anything without a fight. Remember the Cabinet that's calling on us now is the Cabinet that's authorised huge export of coal to Franco in the last six months alone. Those are the birds who talk now about short-ages and the miners pulling their weight. Aye, we'll pull our weight all right, in more ways than one.'

There was general and boisterous applause. The solution of the fuel crisis and the crucial movement into socialism and workers' control seemed obviously bound up.

'I was watching Bill Higgins,' said Dick to Mike afterwards. 'He was screwing up his eyes all the time. I bet he was trying to remember it all, so he could tell Mr Richards. He's been seen talking to him in a pub in Jubilee Street, so Ted was saying.'

'The skunk,' said Mike. 'We didn't ought to have gone on working in the same pit as a man who blacklegged in twenty-six. The management always looked after him well, gave him easy spots or found some way of filling his pocket. Not like others. Alan was telling me a while back how he was doing work on the trams twice as heavy as what he was scheduled for, through old Harry falling sick, but he couldn't get the full rate, not though he jammed his hand and still went on working.'

'We should have turfed out all the old management when we made a new start,' said Dick, 'except for a few like Mr Henderson.'

'Not that we mind Richards or anyone else knowing what we're saying and doing,' said Mike. 'It's just that Bill Higgins has been running off to tell tales so long he can't stop.' He mused. 'All the same, it's time he ran into somebody's fist on a dark night.'

'Yes, it's bad,' said Dick, 'and I can't stomach the agent, Colonel Hiscock, getting a fat job on the Regional Board.'

'He tried to get me jailed once under E. W. O.,' said Mike, 'because I caught a chill and forgot to get a doctor's certificate. He had his knife into anyone who didn't suck up to him in the Home Guard. He picked up information at the Boys' Club he ran, and used it against us.'

'I hope the Consultative Committee's different now, after what Mr Henderson said.'

'It's been a farce,' said Mike. 'We sit round a table, sign a paper, and get three bob. Then one of them or one of us takes the chair, asks if the minutes are passed, yawns, and asks if anyone wants to raise anything. We look blank, and somebody says the Bevin Boys are a wash-out,

and then maybe I say the pneumatic pressure's weak on the faces. So the manager chips in: Aye, and a whole shift was lost through absenteeism on Easterly. After that we keep mum, and the chairman winds up. Once we pressed a point and had it sent to the Controller, but nowt happened. Then when Mr Henderson became manager, he tried to discuss development plans, but Colonel Hiscock reported him to the Directors and he got sat on. They'd already given him strict instructions—no more technical equipment to be supplied, they'd get just as much money when the mines were nationalised.'

Trucks had just passed, rattling over some ill-laid points, and their noise was still loud in his ears. He paused, to take a rag from his belt and wipe his face, and the man behind, another Dick, went on ahead down the tramlines with their straining cables. A rending crack, and a large lump of shale fell on the man ahead, knocking him flat. Dick drew back, listening for any further fall, but heard nothing. He ran forward and carried his namesake away, farther down the roadway. A miner named Lukins came running up.

They stood looking at the stricken man, then Lukins knelt and felt his heart. 'Aye, his skull's fair cracked. And only half an hour ago he gave me a bite of his bacca to chew.' He felt the man's heart again. 'Aye, he's quiet as a stopped clock. He's stark dead.'

Two other miners came up. They prepared to raise and carry the body. 'His Mary'll take it bad,' said one. 'She's six months gone, a gradely decent little woman. We'll have a pit-meeting and ask for a stoppage out of our pay for her. She'll be dead, too, if she has to wait while they're haggling over compensation.'

'Aye, and he was such a laughing sort of lad,' said Lukins. 'This very morning I said to him: You're grinning like my granny at a hot puff-cake, anyone'd think you enjoyed yourself. And he only grinned the wider. Like a Cheshire cat chewing gravel. And now he won't grin no more. No, now he won't grin no more.'

As they trudged on, one of the older men blamed the machines for their noise. Before the machines a man could get to know the meaning of each crack, creak, rustle, drip, and act accordingly; but now there were many more accidents. Dick said you couldn't keep the machines out; what you wanted was better safety devices and precautions, but the owners had only thought of profits and there wasn't even any pretence of keeping such regulations as there were. 'Things'll be different now.'

'Don't look as if they are,' said the man.

'We can't expect 'em different in a few weeks.'

'It's still pie in the sky,' said Lukins.

'It's the speed-up,' said the older man. 'They'll be asking us to rip the coal with our bare hands soon.'

'That's going too far,' said Dick.

As he was coming out of the baths he met Mike. 'You've got a face like Solomon Sampson's sow,' said Mike, 'that wouldn't ever learn to read but was a devil to think. What's wrong?'

'I dunno. . . . Dick Sanders was killed today.'

Mike knitted his brows. 'Dick Sanders, we were going to play a game of darts tonight.'

'It's the first death I've seen since I came back.'

They walked on. 'But you must have seen more than a few things like that where you were in the war.'

'Somehow it's not the same.' He pondered. 'Or maybe it is. I don't know.'

'Oh, well. . . .' said Mike, and paused, but his hand on Dick's shoulder tightened.

He didn't say anything about the accident at home, but over tea his father brought it up. 'So Dick Sanders won't hand in any more checks. Somebody told me you were one of them who earned him in.'

Dick nodded. His mother was listening anxiously and wanted to know all the details. 'Poor Mary, I must go round and see what I can do to help.' She kept looking at Dick to make sure he wasn't hiding an injury.

Baxter put his hands to the fire and changed the subject. 'It's getting cold enough to starve an otter to death.' He looked round to make sure that Alice wasn't in. 'I don't like to say it, but I just met that Joe of Alice's in High Street, and I can't say I like his face. His eyesight cuts across somewhere about the end of his nose as sharp as a pair of scissors.'

'Don't let Alice hear you say that,' said Mrs Baxter. 'After all, it's no great fault that he's a provident sort. The best o' folks need biding with a bit sometimes.'

'Alice can have him if her heart's set on it,' said Baxter. 'But I still think he's one of those who'll lend you a shilling if you've given him fourteen pence to stick to. And that's not my notion of a man.'

'Maybe it'd now be better for poor Mary Sanders if her man had had a thrifter way about him,' said Mrs Baxter, unable to forget the accident. 'She'll be hard put to keep alive and bear his child, with the creditors swarming all round like black beetles, poor soul.'

'We'll see she doesn't starve,' said Baxter, taking up his warmed

slippers. 'What do you think we are? Even if we aren't all in a single poke like in the pit villages, we still hold together. That's why it's better to be a miner than anything else. We're right people.'

Dick went out. He felt confined at home tonight, but he didn't want to go to the pub. He stopped at the bus-halt, and waited behind two women. 'Eec, I wish the bus would come,' said one.

'What's fretting you, dear?' asked the other.

'It's our George. He's waiting at home all this time for his tea.'

'Why shouldn't he wait once in a hundred years?'

'Eec, you don't know our George.' She peered at a clock down the road. 'It's five to seven. The bus's late.'

'He can make his own tea for once, can't he?'

'You don't know our George, he wouldn't make his own tea, not if I wasn't home till midnight.'

Then the bus came round the corner. Dick took it for a couple of stages, and then walked to Joan's place. Lucy opened the door, with her hair sticking out in all directions in plaits. 'Joan's here. Do you want to see her?'

'Bring him in,' shouted Mrs Fitton. 'You're letting an iceberg into the house. Shut the door.'

He went into the kitchen and found Mrs Fitton in her arm-chair with a large piece of red flannel tied round her face and head. 'Did you hear I was dying, too?' she asked loudly. 'Well, I am, and it ruins my temper. Joan'll be here in a minute, she's out the back. Now tell me all about yourself. It sends me out of what few senses I've still got, to sit here and talk with the cat all day.'

'What about me?' asked Lucy.

'The cat's got brains, but can't talk back. You can talk back, but you haven't got any brains.'

Lucy pealed with merriment at this insult and took the cat in her lap. The back door burst open and Joan ran in, 'Ow, it's cold enough out there to freeze you to the seat. Dear me, why didn't you tell me Dick had come? Hallo, Dick.'

'I'd have kissed him for you, only I've got a cold,' said Mrs Fitton. 'Come on, Lucy, make some more tea, can't you?'

Lucy deposited the cat in Dick's lap, and Joan, getting her hair in some sort of order before the little wall-mirror by the dresser, asked, 'Did you want to see me about anything, Dick?'

'Nothing in particular. Just thought I'd drop in.'

'We're always glad to see you,' said Mrs Fitton, 'and if you come without a reason, we're all the more glad, since it shows you want to see us for our own dear sakes.' She sneezed loudly. 'O Lord, bless me,' and she recited:

*'Sneeze on a Monday you sneeze for danger,
Sneeze on a Tuesday you kiss a stranger.
Sneeze on a Wednesday you sneeze for a letter,
Sneeze on a Thursday for something better.
Sneeze on a Friday you sneeze for sorrow,
Sneeze on a Saturday your sweetheart tomorrow.
Sneeze on a Sunday your safety seek,
The devil will have you the whole of a week.'*

'The devil will have you the whole of a week,' echoed Lucy delightedly. 'But this is Tuesday, you kiss a stranger.'

'Come over here,' said Mrs Fitton to Dick, 'and let me kiss you on the nape of your neck. That won't give you any of my germs, and I'm sure Joan won't mind.' He obeyed her and she went on 'Thanks, now I won't be kept awake waiting for the stranger to come and claim a kiss of my cherry-lips.'

'Tell us a riddle,' said Lucy, excited by the sneeze rhymes

Mrs Fitton obliged, holding her right forefinger up and gradually letting it curl over

*'Little Nanny Netticoat has a white petticoat;
The longer she stands the shorter she grows;
Now cross both your hands and tell me who knows.'*

She crossed her hands quickly and pointed at Lucy, who screamed with pleasure, 'A candle!'

'Don't stir the teapot,' said Mrs Fitton, 'or you'll stir up strife.'

They sat round the table, Mrs Fitton and Lucy, Joan and Dick, and Mrs Fitton did most of the talking. She came from an out-of-the-way country district on the Pennine slopes, and kept lots of old Lancashire ways of thought and speech, which Dick had never heard before but which somehow went home warmly to his bosom.

'Aye, it's a lucky thing to put bones to burn in the fire,' she said in answer to a query from Lucy about what to do with the bones of a rabbit left over from yesterday's supper. Dick felt thoroughly happy and relaxed. He stirred his tea and listened.

Mrs Fitton rambled on, 'Ah yes, marry in haste and repent in leisure. You might say I met Lucy's father on Tuesday, got Lucy on Wednesday, and was married on Thursday. But marriage is the tying of a knot with your tongue that you can't loose with your teeth. And speaking of the days of the week, you couldn't go courting on Fridays in the place where I was born. The lads went round and rang the pan on you if they caught you kissing. They went all through the town

playing on frying-pans and tongs, shovels and pokers, with someone marching in front and bellowing at every corner:

*Oh dear me, oh dear a me,
Dick Baxter and Joan Wittock, I see,
Courting six nights out o' seven,
And couldn't let Friday night alone.*

Lucy clapped her hands at the unexpected appearance of Dick's and Joan's names. 'Dick and Joan couldn't leave Friday night alone.' And as she knew almost all her mother's tales, she said, 'Tell us about Whitworth Moor, mum.'

'That's where they used to run seven times round the moor, seven men without a stitch on, and thousands of folk looking on. I never saw it myself, but my mother saw it many a time. The county police put it down, and the preachers were ranting mad against it. But it never did nobody no harm, and it's a pity to stop customs that go back to the beginning of the world, just because people have grown ashamed of being made the way they are. Aye, a man's honoured if he finds a new way of killing his fellows in hundreds and thousands, but he's earned off to jail if he runs round Whitworth Moor in his birthday-suit. . . .'

As Dick was going he said to Joan, 'Meet me on Friday and we'll take the risk of the pan being rung on us.'

'That's a brave lad,' said Mrs Fitton.

'Thanks a lot,' Dick said to her, wanting to say much more, but unable to find words for the sense of earthy happiness and safety that the evening had given him.

'Put a shawl on and see him out,' said Mrs Fitton in response. She winked at Dick. 'Even if hell's freezing, you won't notice it much. When I was young, a right kiss could always get my innards on fire, spite of all the frosts and preachers in the world.'

19

Yorkshire

'I KNOW I SHOULDN'T have done it,' said Brian, as they lounged in the saloon-bar. He was watching the slim girl in the waist-length jacket who was wriggling about on the high stool as she described something to her companion, a man with black patent-leather hair and a well-pressed herring-bone suit. 'I was more than half-pissed, of course, and

I hung on like grim death. It's a wonder the poor sap didn't throw himself under a bus.'

'I've known for long he didn't want us to find out where he lived,' said Kit, also watching the wriggler in the gold satin clothes.

'It's in one of those terraces,' said Brian. 'You know, we passed 'em a couple of months ago on our bikes, and I said they ought to be condemned, and you said they probably were. And I said your old man was on the Housing Committee—trust him for that. Where else could a councillor get such cheap kudos as by providing an aged couple with a council house now and then, and such a lot of valuable advance information on the values of local real estate? And Colin never said anything.'

'It's been obvious he was hiding his address,' Kit said with a yawn.

'Nasty crumbling little rat-traps,' Brian went on, 'with privies down three steps at the back, waterlogged in rainy weather. But his mother keeps it like a new pin, despite hell, rats, dust, rot, and cockroaches. A dear old creature, with lace cap and all, and the biggest Bible ever seen on a something-or-other with bobbins and a stuffed canary with real moss on a gilt bough in a glass cover. She gave us strong black coffee and couldn't have been nicer. She must have been about fifty when she conceived our Colin. A weakly babe, she mentioned, showing me a photo of him at the age of six months. He had to be bathed in whey, she said. And as for her accomplice in the miracle, Colin's pa, he seems to have died of the shock. Judging from the enlarged photo of him in the parlour, he must have been about ninety-nine, with no teeth and the tallest Gladstonian collar ever worn. You get the impression that he never took it off and that he certainly wore it while begetting Colin.'

'It was obvious Colin didn't want us to know,' said Kit, watching the serpentine length of gold satin wriggle off the stool and sway towards the Ladies.

'It's 12a,' remarked Brian. 'No Thirteen in that row of bad lucks.'

The Coal Board made some extra deliveries on Friday, and Swinton called off the closing of the works. The stewards discussed the new situation caused by the national crisis and decided not to press for strike action till things were normal again.

Kit managed to catch up with Jill as she was leaving the works. She was alone, walking fast, with her coat caught up round her throat. 'Hallo,' she said with a half-distracted air. 'I'm in a hurry.'

'Let's hurry together then,' he said, falling into step. 'Let's settle the world's affairs in five minutes.'

He hadn't meant to start in that provocative way, but her curt wel-

come had irritated him. She answered, 'I wish we could.' But she sounded rather bored, looking straight ahead all the while.

He decided to retract. 'Jill, the last thing I want is an argument. But you're so off hand. I want to discuss you and me. Only you and me. Nothing else interests me at all.'

She said vaguely, 'Well, what do you want? Are you asking me something?'

He was uncertain how to go on, especially as she was walking yet faster. 'I merely thought there was the possibility . . .' He stammered. 'That other night we seemed to be getting near a common denominator of some sort. Really . . .'

But this remote Jill was unlike the Jill of that night, he couldn't say anything of the warm things hovering in his mind. He felt hopelessly undignified. I thought I'd left this sort of adolescent maundering far behind, he told himself. And he felt an intense resentment against Jill. She made no effort to understand, to help.

However, at that very moment she softened and took his arm. 'Why must you badger me when I'm in a rush and trying to think something out? And how romantic you are. You can't solve anything by putting moral pistols to people's heads. All romantics want to pull themselves out of the bog by their own bootstraps.' They walked on, but not so fast. 'Don't you see we can't decide if there's any future for our relationship by thinking how nice it would be if there were? We can only find out by working together—finding how we get along, how far we have anything really in common. Does that sound impossibly chilly and rational?'

'A bit,' he said, abysmally sorry for both himself and her.

'But it isn't. Truly, Kit, can't you see that every time you try to rush me off my feet, I have to fight you back tooth and nail. I'm only a poor lone female, after all. It'd be very easy to throw myself in your arms and let you put some Brahms on the gramophone. I'm not at all what you think I'm like, and that makes me act the charade part you've made up for me. Don't try to take advantage of my romantic sub-self, and I won't hit you in the eye with the class war as a Marxist Amazon. Surely that's fair enough.'

He caught hold of her. 'I'm going straight off to buy all the records of Brahms I can find.'

To his surprise, she responded warmly and moved closer and closer against him. 'You could be quite nice, Kit. . . . You are, almost.' And she kissed him on the mouth. He passed his hand up and down her back.

'Let's go somewhere,' he said in a low voice against her ear.

'Not tonight,' she said. 'I told you I'm in a hurry.' She wrenched

herself free and looked at her wrist-watch. 'Yes, and I'm late.' She saw a bus coming and left him, running for the bus-stop and waving back.

He felt driven on by a tremendous piston-force of elation and triumph, and couldn't bear to stop walking. He arrived home in a sweat and woke up next morning with a temperature. Doctor Greeves said he must stay in bed for some days. At first he revolted against this injunction, which seemed designed to cut him off from a Jill turned charitable; but he controlled himself and to some extent enjoyed the escape from the various decisions pressing in on him.

He threw Virginia Woolf's interminable *Waves* under the bed and read Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, till he couldn't bear it any longer and threw it under the bed, too. *Waves* without purpose were bad enough, but the perverse element in Lawrence's mind was made even more objectionable by the solid proletarian world against which it was reacting. There was something in *Sons and Lovers* which Kit found too disturbingly close to his own spiritual state, despite the many differences. He asked Margaret to fetch him some Balzac from the Library. *Last Illusions*, *The Peasants*, and *César Birotteau* were the ones she brought. Some comment on Balzac's insight into the omnipresent power of money had turned his thoughts that way, and as he read he felt that here at last everything was laid bare. Why hadn't he realised it before? He was learning more about Britain, Yorkshire, his father, himself, by reading Balzac on the France of the Restoration than a hundred years of Jill's and Dan's arguments about Capitalism could have taught him. He wanted to summon Jill and Dan to his bedside and make them realise this truth, he felt it ought somehow to silence and shame them, though essentially Balzac's picture more than vindicated their analysis. But you leave out something that Balzac gets in, he wanted to say, something that's the core of the whole thing, the human aspect of the struggle.

He thought of Jill a lot in relation to everything he read. He kept imagining what she'd say if they were reading the books together. At one and the same time he wanted her as she was—what he called a Marxist Barbarian strong-thewed with the Future—and wanted her changed, wanted her to admit that she had been taking a limited view and that he had opened to her senses a richer world, a fuller delight in the manifold play of life.

He asked Margaret, his happy slave, to bring him the manuscripts from his drawer, where they had lain untouched for months, and was surprised, humiliated, by their derivative vagueness, their lack of relevance to the conflicts now revealed in his mind, his life. The stories in which he had tried to express a subtle union of spirits now seemed to

contain only a meandering void, beginning with a provincial version of E. M. Forster's donnish suburbanite refinements, and ending in Hemingway dashed with Kafka; and the poems, starting with imitations of A. E. Housman and moving via Auden into Eliot, seemed even more spectrally remote:

*The pathos of distance in the landscape of your eye
Lost in the calligraphic clouds.
The mountains with no bases
Except their snow reflections in the lake.*

*Ophelia's pucelage
Nibbled by minnows*

And so on. Apart from the fact (which he now noted for the first time) that 'the pathos of distance' was stolen from Nietzsche, the lines seemed to have no meaning except the wish to claim a superior sensibility. How could he show such stuff to Jill, for example?

From the newspapers he learned of the snowfalls, the increasing cuts in gas and electricity, the government warnings and appeals. His mother brought up an oil-heater; and he lay musing on the white world which had been disastrously congealing outside. Read more Balzac or stared at the sky icy-green beyond his window-pane. Once his father looked in and said, 'Well, young man? No need to get up. We're closing down the mill.' And left a dim perturbation in his thoughts.

Margaret tiptoed in to smooth his pillow and tell him in an awed voice what the radio had just said.

'I wish we were in a lonely farmstead and the snow cut us off.' She laughed. 'It'd be terrible if we had to eat Minx, wouldn't it?' Minx was the ageing Persian cat who ignored everybody but Mrs Swinton. 'I bet she's tough and stringy. Would you like another hot-water bottle, or a cup of coffee?'

He watched her young, warm, mobile face. 'You'll be ravishing in a year or two, Meg.'

She leaned close to his pillow and whispered, 'As fascinating as that woman we met at the hotel on our night out?'

'Several thousand times.'

She still whispered. 'Did you ever meet her again? I often think of the way she looked at you. Do tell me.'

'No, I haven't. And I won't if I can help it.'

'I do think men are odd,' she said, drawing back and staring at him. He roared with laughter and then coughed. 'Don't be so funny, Meg. It isn't good for me in my debilitated condition.'

'I know more than you think,' she said crossly.

'I'm sure you do. Now don't make me laugh, please.'

She went out with her nose in the air; but soon forgave him and returned with more radio-news or a story of her own.

'We drove over to Wagley, and the children were sledging in the main street. But ashes were put down, so they sledged on the moor road. Then ashes were put on that, so they sledged in the field behind the church. And now there's too much snow to make ashes any use. I saw a hare scampering over the hill. And a flock of snow-buntings.'

'You look as ceremonially rosy as a holly berry,' he said. 'Give me your hands'

They felt cool and pure of the snow, though she'd been warming them in woollen gloves. She rushed on with her account. 'You can only tell the road by the posts. Down by the stream I saw six dead shrew-mice. Oh, I feel so sorry for the birds. I've been putting out crumbs and bits of fat. The tits love fat ...'

The image of a lost Britain suddenly cut off from the rest of the world, cut off from time and history, under a wintry shroud of virgin white and guarded by fanged winds, it haunted his thoughts, merging with his convalescent mood. He, too, felt cut off, suffering a wintry withdrawal, seeking a new centre of living before he turned back towards the entangled movements of the outer world. What would come of it? A new birth or an enfeebled frame? A new basis of union or an intensified discord?

Margaret rushed back, wild-haired and wild-eyed. Blizzards were sweeping here, blizzards were sweeping there. Food was dropped by planes for isolated farms, for sheep stranded on the Welsh hills. Bulldozers were fighting to break through to lost villages. Telephone wires snapped in myriads. Men fell into crevasses. Roads were impassable, soldiers rushed up in lorries to shovel snow away and keep communications open. Trains crawled along doubtful lines. Bolts and girders broke. Frost was a mad invisible enemy tearing, cracking, hammering with sharp picks, filing away. Birds died frozen in the copses. The grouse froze in the snow where they crouched. The hares did no more scampering. Ice was creeping over the land like a new glacier age. As though the enemy that had been threatening Britain's post-war developments, sapping the moral and economic bases, had at last been driven out into the open. Still invisible, but at least unable to keep his sabotage hidden.

And somehow he felt at ease, pleased at this violent attack of frost and snow and ice. As if it ended the complicated moral issues that had been curdling his spirit, contracting his powers of action.

To his surprise Jane called and was brought up by Margaret. 'I

thought you might like some calves'-foot jelly,' she said gawkily.

'I'll take it down to the kitchen,' said Margaret, and went out.

'Why don't you sit down?' he asked. 'Actually I'm not ill or sinking. I merely couldn't bear looking at people any longer.'

There was an uncomfortable silence, then Jane said humbly, 'I didn't really mean to have that accident. I told a lie when I said I wanted it, I was so . . . so unhappy.' She gulped. 'I might do many wrong things, but I'd never try to commit suicide.'

'Don't boast,' he replied, and then with an invalid's reckless optimism he took her hand. 'We're all unhappy. You mustn't think you're so remarkable.' She flushed with pleasure, and he added, 'You really are good, Jane.'

'I'm not,' she said, recoiling and removing her hand. 'You only say that to hurt me.' With lowered eyes she protested, 'I'm not at all what you think I am.' She forced herself to look him in the face.

'When anyone looks me straight in the eyes,' said Kit, 'I know he's lying. You're asserting, I believe, that you've vindicated your right-to-experience and still consider sex to be holy.'

'Yes,' she said, looking away at the floor, looking back, and then looking out of the window. She opened and shut the bag in her lap.

'Did it happen like the motor accident?' he asked with a touch of bitterness to which he knew he had no right. 'Because you were thinking of something else? And did you avoid a smash at the last moment?'

She didn't reply, but went on opening and shutting the bag clasp. Then she said, 'I saw your friend Wotton. It was he who told me you were ill. He was with that rather bold girl—what's her name, Jill something.'

'I've been expecting him to come along,' he said, trying to appear casual. 'Where was it you saw him?'

She named the High Street near Jill's place, and he struggled not to give his feelings away, not to let her see what a blow she had delivered. Stupid as she was in many ways, she had somehow found out enough about him and Jill to know that she *was* delivering a blow; in fact, she had come to deliver it. He smiled. 'Aren't you observant, Jane? How kind of you to come and tell me all that.' He threw the bedclothes off. 'But now you're here, why don't you get in with me?'

She stood up, knocking the chair over. 'I don't deserve to be mocked at,' she said in a stifled voice. 'Not by you, of all people. . . . I won't do it again . . . I won't. . . .' She clenched her fists and went out, holding the tears back under her eyelids and bumping on the door-post.

I hope she doesn't fall down the stairs, he thought, sitting in his pyjamas on the edge of the bed. She's right. I ought to be ashamed of

myself; but I was only half-joking. . . . Now that her face isn't so fat, she looks almost handsome. All she needs is some sound advice on make-up, and a little more suffering to thin her down and get rid of that myopic dazed look in her eyes.

Margaret came in. 'What happened? She came down the stairs, leaning on the banisters, as if she was afraid of slipping.'

'She was afraid of slipping.'

'But why?'

'Don't ask so many questions, go and tell mother I'm getting up.'

'You're a bear,' said Margaret, 'and I don't know why so many women fall for you. What did you do to Jane to crush her like that?'

'Sssh,' he laid his finger on his lips. 'Just go and tell mother.'

In a few moments Mrs Swinton was bustling anxiously in. 'Oh, do be careful, Kit. Remember how weak you must be. You mustn't go out into the bitter cold for a day or two. There's a roaring fire in the dining-room. I'll get you some coffee.'

He rang up Wotton and asked him to come over. Wotton said he'd come straight after lunch. And when he arrived, with the recent *Life* of Bevin under his arm, Kit took him into the long dining-room with a leather couch at one end, and asked what had been happening at the works.

The men had attempted to run the mill under its own power; and Wotton's opinion was that they'd have succeeded if the management had co-operated. But every difficulty was thrown in their way, and after three days they'd had to give up. The sheds were too cold to work in. Now the sheds were closed till the end of the crisis.

'The stewards had gangs clearing away the snow; and the electricians and others worked, partly in their own time, to rig up heating apparatus of an emergency kind. But it wasn't any use.'

'Do you think Father wanted to close the works?' Kit asked, and when Wotton nodded, he asked, 'Why?'

'Don't forget he's got a strike threat over his head. If he sends the weavers home to freeze a bit, they'll be so worried about getting their jobs back that they won't be so very belligerent when he reopens. Also, don't forget he'll be able to get rid of the men—and the women—whom he blames for the strike trouble.'

'Won't that mean a strike?'

'It would normally, but not now that he's got them all on the run.'

Kit pondered, 'Yes, I see. . . .' He broke off as Margaret came in with coffee. 'This is young Margaret. She keeps drowning me in coffee.'

'I like watching it bubble,' said Margaret.

'She declaims Lady Macbeth at the coffee-thing,' said Kit. 'It makes her think of the witches' cauldron.'

'Why Lady Macbeth?' asked Wotton, trying to be polite. 'I should have thought Rosalind or—'

'Ophelia or Doll Tearsheet,' said Kit.

'I don't declaim at the coffee-pot,' said Margaret, 'but it's true I'm going to act Lady Macbeth next term.'

'Do invite me if it's possible,' pleaded Wotton, and Margaret went off with a flush of pleasure.

'I meant to drop Jill a line,' said Kit, looking out of the window, 'but I lost her address and couldn't think of the house's number. I didn't want the letter to go astray. . . .' His voice died uncertainly away.

'Yes, I did see her once, for a moment,' said Wotton, 'at *The Green Man*. I told her you were laid up.'

'Thanks.' He spoke coolly, but he felt enraged. Someone was lying. *The Green Man* wasn't anywhere near Jill's home. Of course Wotton hadn't said that he saw her only at *The Green Man*, and Jane may have got things mixed up. But in his weakened condition Kit felt savagely jealous; and when a few minutes later he found that Wotton was telling him an anecdote of the black-market in textiles, he interrupted. 'That's nonsense. It's hugely exaggerated, the black-market in Leeds.'

'Of course statistics aren't easy! But I should have thought all competent observers consider the black-market in textiles to be enormous.'

'Among small firms on the edge of bankruptcy.'

'Some of the bigger ones, too. In fact, most of them, one way or another.'

Kit shrugged. 'Our firm isn't by any means among the biggest, yet we don't touch such things.'

'Are you quite sure?'

'That sounds like an accusation. I don't think you ought to make it unless you can substantiate what you say.'

'Can anyone ever substantiate these things?'

'Well, at least be precise about it.'

Wotton began to show alarm. 'Look here, Kit. I never thought you'd take my remarks personally. I was just speaking of the prevalence of such practices. In my opinion, it's very interesting. Firms that before the war would have cheerfully gone bankrupt rather than get a single spot of pitch on their hands, now plunge their arms in elbow-deep.' He blinked nervously. 'It's a moral collapse. You might call it the end of the Nonconformist conscience which until 1939 was dominant in much of our industry outside the big combines.'

'I distrust all these glub generalisations,' said Kit harshly. 'You and

Dan and Jill and the rest of you make them in such a cocksure way that nobody thinks of asking for the facts on which you base them. Be honest. You just haven't a scrap of evidence for all these statements of yours.'

Wotton flushed, but stuck to his guns. 'A man can't work in an industry for years without getting a sense of its methods, its moral basis. . . .'

'That's only a dignified way of saying guesswork.'

Margaret opened the door. 'Would either of you like a raspberry tart? I've just made thousands of them. Bottled raspberries, of course. And they're still boiling hot.'

'I'd love a raspberry tart,' said Wotton bravely.

20

Tyneside

JEAN SAT WITH FACE propped up in her hands, leaning over the kitchen table. 'It's no use trying to tell you any fibs, Chris. You're sure you don't mind putting me up for a week.'

'Don't be silly,' said Christine Mackenzie, briskly wringing out some baby's napkins. 'But you couldn't have said I was having another. It's only six months since the last.'

'I just said I was going to stay with you. You see, we aren't on that kind of speaking terms where questions are asked.'

'I'm sorry to hear it's as bad as all that.'

'It's worse, Chris.'

'You haven't left him, have you?'

'No, it hasn't come to that yet. But I felt the only thing to do was to get away on my own for a few days. Then I'll see how I feel when I get back. It's not all his fault, you know.'

'It must be, Jean. I'll lay my life. Any man that couldn't get on with you must be a pernickety devil.'

Jean gave a long mournful sigh. 'You confirm my worst suspicions of myself, Chrissie. Any woman that was so godalmighty good as you make me out would be enough to drive a decent man to drink or fornication. It's my Calvinist forefathers that always make that word sound so rolling and riotous in my ears. Not that Will has taken to drink or the other pretty thing. He's gone whoring after strange gods, not painted hussies.'

'I still can't quite make out what's wrong,' said Christine apologetically. 'But I stick by what I said about any man who couldn't get

on with you.' She wrung out the last napkin and pegged it on the string over the stove. 'Let's have a cup of tea, and I'll try not to be so slow.' Then she brightened. 'No, I'll tell you what. I've got a bottle of Guinness. I don't often keep anything in the house, but we had a little do last Monday. Luke brought home a friend from Middlesbrough, such a card. I only wish I could help you,' she concluded wistfully.

'Get the Guinness, love,' said Jean, 'though I've said my say.'

All the same, she went on talking about herself and Will; and Chris sat astride a chair, with her arms resting on its back, listening with a puzzled look in her pale eyes, laying her long thin face on her arms, first one way then the other. Her pale yellow hair was tied loosely in a piece of string at the nape of her neck, and she was dressed in a green jumper and brown skirt. 'Yes, but what happened?' she asked several times.

Jean told her all about Harry and Annie. 'Talk of a madhouse! In my opinion the Board of Control are the ones who ought to be locked up. I've been pestering the solicitor, and he's found out a few things. He looked into another local case, for instance. A girl who was backward at school through being badly blitzed in forty-one. She was certified while her father was abroad in the army. When he was demobbed, he tried to get her out, but nobody listened. So he found out where she was, took her away, and reported what he'd done to the police. He got a doctor in, who said the girl was all right; and he put a solicitor on to the Board. The Board gave up the girl's ration-book, and then sent five policemen and two nurses at ten-thirty one night to carry her off.'

'It didn't ought to be allowed,' said Christine helplessly.

'The father got the matter taken up by someone on the Council, and he was told that he and his wife had signed the girl away. When he answered that his wife had died when the girl was a baby, and he'd been fighting overseas when the certifying was done, no notice was taken. So he got up a petition signed by seventy local people and the doctor, saying the girl acted quite normally, and all the county authorities did was to say that there was no point in considering his application, as he hadn't got a house of his own.'

'It didn't ought to be allowed,' Christine repeated. 'It makes my flesh creep.'

'I'm going to fight it while I've got a breath left in my lungs and a penny in my purse.'

'But I still don't see what it's got to do with you and Will.'

'Not directly. But he takes such a selfish view of the whole thing. All he's worried about is the effect on his good name. His good name think of it! In a society that lets poor Annie be murdered to satisfy her father's mania.'

'I'm surprised to hear it,' said Christine, trying to speak in a judicial sort of voice. 'I don't agree with what you say he says. But still I don't think you ought to leave him.'

'It isn't only that,' Jean stared at her Guinness. 'And as I said before, I don't think he's the only one to blame.'

'Then why are you to blame?' asked Christine incredulously.

'You're young,' said Jean. 'Yes, you are. My opinion is that if a marriage goes wrong, there's always a certain amount of blame on both sides. You don't know what a bitter tongue I've got in my head when the devil wags it. I've seen him drifting away for a long time now, and as I look back, it seems I've done nothing but shove him off all the faster. I've stood apart and judged him, Chrissie. I'm a Pharisee.'

'I'm sure you're not,' said Christine indignantly, determining to look Pharisee up in the dictionary. 'Not the least little tiny bit.' She rose with a shiver and went to dig hopefully in the empty coal scuttle.

'But I have tried now and then,' said Jean, smiling sadly. 'I've sworn I'll govern this wicked tongue of mine and be humble. But somehow I can't. I can't plead with him as I know I ought. What sort of stiff-necked pride is it that stops me from saying what I want to say?'

'But what do you want to say?' asked Christine, wide-eyed, wriggling her chilled shoulders.

'Just that I love him and want to be loved, you silly little fool,' cried Jean affectionately. 'And because I can't say it, because I haven't said it for so long, I don't love him any longer and I don't want to be loved. Do you understand now?' And to the dismay of both herself and Christine, she burst into tears.

Emery was hoping that Partridge would go before Miss Pickering finished typing. Partridge wanted to tell an interminable anecdote about a boilermaker who went to sleep in a boiler and woke up long after everyone else was gone from the yard. Then Oliver looked in, laughing so heartily at his own pretence of misunderstanding Partridge that Emery gave up all hope and sat back grinning painfully and tapping himself on the brow with the black ruler. But suddenly Bardle put his head round the door, and Partridge remembered he wanted to see him about the fuel shortage. Then Oliver made a rush at his drawer, extracted some papers, said, 'Ta-ta, Barbara, be good or at least be careful,' and hurried out.

Emery sighed and gave himself a rap with the ruler that stung. He put the ruler down and remarked, staring at the ceiling, 'You don't happen to have a few minutes free this evening, do you? I'd like a bit of a chat in more congenial surroundings.'

She turned with a polite smile, 'Certainly, Mr Emery.'

As they walked out of the building, he had a feeling that everyone was peering round doors or through keyholes, noticing and nodding and winking. Yet he had walked out with her often before, when they both happened to finish work at the same time; and then he had never had this feeling. But he talked on in a calm equable voice, and she seemed aware of no strain in his manner, nothing strange in his invitation. They stood for a moment in the street, in the blast of cold, and then he said sharply, 'This way,' and went right. He didn't know where he was taking her, but he wanted to get away from the building where all the windows were slitted with malicious eyes. 'Do you know anywhere for coffee round here at this time?' he asked as they turned the corner; and while she hesitated, he went on, 'Doesn't matter. How about a sherry instead?'

'I'm sure I don't mind,' she said demurely. 'Whatever suits you, Mr Emery.'

'I think we can drop mustering and musing now,' he said, taking her elbow, 'don't you, Barbara?'

'If you say so,' she replied.

'You know my Christian name by this time, I hope.'

'Yes, William Ambrose.'

'Now, now, we're not signing documents,' he said playfully. 'Can't you relax a little?'

'I've a friend Lotty,' she replied, 'and I keep telling her to relax. And she always says: If I did, I'd fall off the chair.'

He took a firmer grip of her arm. 'You can relax as much as you like. I won't let you fall.'

'Oh, I'm not like Lotty.'

He guided her through the chilly evening by devious side-streets, determined to get as far away from all familiar eyes as possible, making for a small pub which he'd struck once by accident. He knew they sold wine there, as he'd seen a large handsome half-caste woman with a big red flower in her hair drinking Australian port. 'You know, it's astonishing . . . we spend years daily with a person, and hardly know a thing about him or her. . . . We all ought to be more friendly together. . . . He went on talking almost without thought, his energies concentrated on a point in the future which he had not yet clearly defined, but which stirred him like the memory of the red flower in the shining black hair, the large fleshy mouth wet with wine.

'I'm sure some people haven't much to know about,' demurred Miss Pickering. 'One day's just like another. I get sick of it sometimes.'

'There, you see you're telling me things about yourself already. You've never said that before, and I never suspected it.'

'You never asked me,' she answered, and he caught a faint smile on her lips.

They came suddenly on the pub and went in. Yes, the shadowy corner where the half-caste woman had sat with the Irishman was empty. He fetched a sherry and a whisky from the bar, and sat by Miss P. on the wall-seat, pressing his thigh against hers. They sat silently for a while and then he said, 'Do you mind if I talk about myself a bit?'

'No, why shouldn't you?'

He wanted to tell her about the impasse of his married life, but he was afraid that if he mentioned Jean at all, it would put her off. However, he couldn't see any other way to reach intimacy with her; and, besides, the matter was obsessing him, he did want to talk about it, get it off his mind. 'I'm pretty wretched these days and I haven't anyone to turn to

'I thought you had something on your mind,' she admitted.

'And I thought I was hiding it quite well. My home-life's gone all to pot ...'

'I'm so sorry,' she murmured

'Tell me something about yourself'

'Oh, there isn't anything to tell'

Still, they talked about themselves till closing-time. 'I'd buy a bottle,' he said, 'if there was anywhere to go

He thought she wasn't going to take the hint. She turned away, and then said half over her shoulder, 'You can come for a cup of tea to my place if you like.'

'Well, you have got a neat hide-out here,' he said admiringly. After the chill of the dark streets the flat certainly did seem remarkably cosy.

She looked round, then back to the mirror, tidying her hair. 'It's nice in a way, all on one's own.' She seemed a new person, more confident, more charming. 'Make yourself at home. I shan't be a moment.'

He sat staring round, amiably lapped in the warmth of wine, and remembered that he hadn't yet opened the bottle he'd brought. He went through into the little kitchen. 'Sorry, Barbara, but have you got a corkscrew?'

She turned and half-bumped into him, and he took her in his arms. 'Steady, little girl.' He kissed her. She accepted his embrace passively, then pushed him away.

'The kettle's boiling. Here's the corkscrew. Now go back.'

He opened the bottle with a feeling of elated confidence. She came in with a tray of tea-things and they sat side by side on the small sofa, with the tray on the floor in front of her. As she bent down, he played

with the little fluffy curls at the nape of her neck, and was hurt when she pushed his hand away. 'Don't. You mustn't do that.'

'Why mustn't I?'

'You're a married man. I don't mind being friends with you, but I can't forget you're a married man, really I can't. I'm made that way. I'd rather do anything than come between a man and his wife. Really, I would. I can't help it.' She wiped a tear from her eye. 'It may be silly of me. Lotty says it is. But I just can't help it.' She sighed, as if she were always trying to overcome this qualm, and failing.

'But you can't come between us. We've parted.'

She twisted herself round to stare in his eyes. 'For good? You've really parted? Swear it.'

'I swear it, Barbara. It's all over. We've parted.'

She went on staring. 'That's different then.' She turned back to the tea. But when he tried again to caress her, she still repelled him. 'No, please don't. I'm not one of those girls who can let themselves go and forget about tomorrow. Sometimes I wish I was. But I can't, really. Lotty says I miss a lot. But I can't help it, please.'

He kissed her cheek, her lips, but she still sat there passive. 'Barbara, you can't treat me like this. . . . I've told you how unhappy I am . . . I need your help.'

'That makes it different, in a way,' she agreed. 'I've got the greatest respect for you, Mr Emery—'

'Will, call me Will.'

'Will, then. But I couldn't. No, I couldn't. Not unless I was sure you respected me. There's one thing in life I can't bear, and that's disrespect. I'd kill a man who got round me and then didn't respect me, really I would. I wouldn't kill a man for anything else, no. But I would for that. My mother always used to say: You can do without love, Barb, but you can't do without respect. The truest words she ever said. Please, Mr Emery, try and understand what I'm saying.'

'But I respect you, I do, I do respect you,' he repeated, and she let him kiss her.

'That makes it different,' she murmured. 'But how do I know you're speaking the truth?'

Gradually his self-confidence, undermined by her unexpected resistance, came back. Because of the many temptations set aside in his married life, he'd come to think of himself as a man whom women found very attractive; but as soon as he'd had to woo Miss P., he found that he knew almost nothing of women. He felt clumsy, crude, alternating between a pitiful sense of weakness and a wish to be violent, and somehow he blamed Jean. 'I respect you most deeply . . . my dear Barbara. . . . Really I do.'

Suddenly he understood that she was much more affected by the wine than he'd thought. He reached over and turned the light off, and kissed her again. Her passionate response almost unnerved him, so abrupt, so shameless, so thorough. It seemed only a few moments before she had all her clothes off and lay moaning in his embrace; and even in the excitement of that first possession he felt a little scared. Who was this strange passionate woman who clung to him, who received him with what seemed an agony of insatiable desire—something that he had never known, never even suspected in Jean or the couple of girls who had preceded her with hurried park embraces? Hell, what had he let himself in for? What would happen now in the office? How would the wild woman whom he had released in the passive self-contained Miss P. appear next day? And yet he couldn't help feeling proud, as if he was the only man ever able to penetrate to this madness slumbering inside the virginal-looking Miss P. whom Oliver had once described as wedded to her typewriter.

He woke with a start. Miss P. was standing before him, dressed carefully and coolly in her usual way, with the brooch at her throat. 'Did you sleep well?' she asked, as if she were a nurse coming in to a patient. What had happened to the wild woman of the darkness?

He blinked against the early morning light and shivered. 'Thanks.' He gulped the hot tea and felt better. 'I didn't hear you get up.'

'I sleep lightly,' she replied, then hesitated. Was she going to make some declaration, appeal, accusation, demand? He waited in trepidation, but she merely asked in her slightly distant voice, 'I've only a very small piece of bacon. Would you like it or some cornflakes?'

'Nothing,' he replied in relief, 'only some more tea.'

21

Lancashire

THE MILLS HAD STOPPED, and Alice was at home. 'It's too cold to go out, and it's too cold to stay at home,' she moaned, and when Dick reminded her that she had always complained about having to go to work, she asked him what was the use of a holiday in such arctic weather. 'Oh, mum, can't we have some more coal on the fire? Look how blue my hands are.' But for some unexplained reason coal deliveries had been late for the muners, and they, like everyone else, were short of fuel. Some of the women tried to find coal on the dumps, but the work was too gruelling in the bitter frost. Old Mrs

Greenwood, two doors off, died on her doorstep one morning; her heart stopped as she came out with her knitted shopping-bag. 'How awful it'd be to dig a grave in this weather,' said Alice with gloomy satisfaction.

She quarrelled with her Joseph about the carpet to be bought for the house that they hadn't got. Alice wanted a floral design of pink cabbage-roses; but Joseph, who by dint of reading articles in photographic monthlies, considered himself an authority on Design, wanted one with a pseudo-cubistic pattern of triangles and squares. 'If we have that kind of carpet,' complained Alice, 'we'll have to have a tea-service like it—like the one that Marian has, with horrid handles, pointed things without a hole to stick your finger in. And I want a set with roses on 'em, like those in the shop down by the station.'

Joseph was huffy at having his superiority in taste questioned, and for a week the engagement was in danger of being broken off. Alice caught a bad cold, and snuffed and sniffled round the house, till her mother insisted on her staying in bed, to keep her out of the way. But soon Alice said the bedroom was so cold she was afraid of pneumonia, and sat crouched over the kitchen fire, blowing her nose and embroidering a silk slip for her trousseau. 'I don't know why I'm doing this,' she repeated at intervals.

'Then why do it?' asked Dick, when she said it in his presence.

'It's not for you, shut up.'

'Now, now,' said Mrs Baxter, 'don't bother her, Dick. She's poorly.'

'Well, perhaps they'll appreciate the miners at last,' said Baxter, looking up genially from his evening paper.

Next morning the work-bus broke down half-way, and the miners had to tramp along the slippery road in the frosty darkness. 'Seems it's never going to end,' said Mike. 'Sometimes it scares you when you think of it.'

Dick grunted a noncommittal reply. Plodding on in the hard snow and ice, he was mentally as well as physically numbed. He felt that something important was happening, but he couldn't sort it out. His return; the break with Pat, the decision to go down the pit, Vesting Day, the fuel crisis, the mounting resolution of the men to show how Britain depended on the miners—and then a heavy check, a dullness of fatigue and confusion. Something important was summed up in the frost, the snow, the blizzard, the unending cold—the challenge and the response, the strength and the weakness, of himself and his fellows. But the more this conviction settled down on his mind, the more numbed his thoughts became.

He lurched and bumped into Frank Wilson, who was arguing that

the Lancashire miners ought to volunteer for Sunday work during the emergency. 'Others are doing it.'

'More fools they,' said Alex. 'Nobody'll thank us, and they'll use our hard work against the claim for the five-day week.'

'The hell they will. The Union will see about that.'

'Can't trust the Board,' said Alex.

Someone shouted, and they halted. Through the glimmering dark they gradually made out a tractor with an improvised snow-plough coming along the road. 'The canals are frozen,' said Frank, still wanting to argue; but nobody answered him.

Dick stamped his feet and clenched his hands inside his pockets. The tractor went slowly past, driven by a lad in battle-dress.

They trudged on again. A clump of houses loomed up. Only about a quarter of a mile now. In one of the upstairs windows a light went on, and a fattish girl in a nightgown came over to draw the curtains. Dick saw her a moment with the gaslight slanting across her broad shoulders and her tousled fair hair, then the light was behind her, and the curtains closed her away. No doubt her bedroom was icy-cold; but her sleep-flushed face in the yellowish light had seemed beautifully warm, ensphered in another world of summery sweetness. And the remembered image broke in him with a sudden warmth, as if for the first time he had realised how piercingly happy and rich life could be. As if the important thing which was happening and which he couldn't grasp had ceased to be outside himself. Now it was in the marrow of his bones, in his thudding heart, in his uplifted mind, in his clenched hands. And it was changed. Not the thing that the papers talked about, not even the thing that Frank Wilson and the others talked about, but something that went deeper and yet more simply into the core of his life, of Britain, of the world.

He was shaken out of his daze by a yell ahead. He hurried on and found Alex leaning over someone. 'What's wrong?'

'It's old Hawkins,' said Alex. 'He was just a few yards in front, and all of a sudden he skidded—fell whack on his back.'

They lifted the old man and carried him on, carefully treading along the edge of the road. Frank and Mike caught them up and lent a hand. 'Poor old sod,' said Mike. 'Must have cracked the back of his head.'

'He cracked it on a stone,' said Alex.

Near the canteen they were met by the ambulance. Someone had hastened ahead and given the warning. 'Come on,' said Mike, 'we're late as it is.' They hurried into the warm dressing-shed.

'There's one thing about the pit,' said Alex. 'It's near enough to Old Nick to be a hot sort of place.'

London

SHE HAD COME to love the dock area. It gave her a feeling of space and purpose. Despite the crammed streets of ugly houses and the tangles of dock buildings, she was aware of earth and sky. And of water. Great bare flat spaces, clattering masses of cranes and ship-masts, sudden tongues of tamed water. All the ends of the world converging suddenly on the banks of the Thames, pouring out frozen meat and wheat, sugar and cement, cane and copper.

And so she felt two tremendous forces at work. That which had devastated and flattened and huddled the area with its houses, its wharfs and storehouses, and somehow produced a sort of powerful order out of the devastation, and that which burst out of the men in revolt.

Daily she was coming to know the dockers better. Ever since the brief strike in sympathy with the haulage men, she felt more a living part of the docks, and felt, too, that the dockers accepted her more thoroughly. They were a clannish lot, she found, full of their own jokes and cross-references. It was easy to listen to a lot of their talk and not realise what it was about at all. For instance, it was some time before she realised that Bicarbonate-of-Soda or Bicarb was the nickname of the small, dark man with a broken nose whom she thought was Fred. He had had an idea that bicarbonate took away the effects of drink, and used to swill some down before going home, if his wife accused him of boozing, he thought someone must have told on him, she couldn't possibly have detected the beer from his behaviour; then one day he was sick on the doorstep and shouted that bicarb had upset his stomach. And the Stepney Hen wasn't a new kind of fowl, it was the fattish chap, Sol, who always kept his hands in his pockets.

Maudie had had a new perm. When she came in, one of the men said, 'Hallo, had a P.L.A. wave this time!' And they all laughed. It took Phyl some time to realise that the joke was on the P.L.A. men with their perm jobs. But when, proud of her perception, she told the joke to Matt, he was surprisingly annoyed.

'That's the kind of joke that helps the bosses. It plays up the old divisions between the workers. The P.L.A. men have some fine things in their record—as good as any of us. It's just being stupid to make jokes like that about won't-come-out. We're all in the same boat, P.L.A. and not P.L.A.'

Maudie had taken up the Stars and worried continually about her Daily Forecast. 'Look here, Phyl, isn't this awful!' She read out:

'Open-handed tactics, plain-speaking and straightforward propositions will all make some advancement. However, a confidential matter or anything calling for diplomatic handling would be difficult. Take arduous precautions against deceptions. Difficult for those in the catering or artistic line. Lucky numbers, 1, 10, 19, 28; colour, yellow.'

'But why is it awful?'

'You know, I'm meeting Reub tonight, and I was sure he didn't mean to deceive me. But I've never yet found the stars tell a lie. I won't trust him an inch now.' She pondered, 'How can I take arduous precautions? Does that mean I ought to refuse a drink? Some gink was telling me that in the olden days they used to put padlocks on their wives. Looks like the Stars are telling me to put one on myself.' She reread the words and sighed with relief. 'Anyway, I can wear my yellow dress, and I've got yellow shoes and stockings. It's a fact I haven't got any yellow knickers, but I know what I'll do, I'll stitch those numbers on in yellow silk. Ten and nineteen over my backside and twenty-eight over the front. That ought to save me.'

Jeff came in. 'Hoped I'd find you all alone. Cuppa, and stir yourself into it. You're sweeter than the sugar we get.' He winked. 'Not that I want to tell you how sweet you are, kid. It'd make you conceited.'

She sat down by him. 'I'll take the risk.'

'But what about me? You might get ideas above your station.' He took her hand and went to poke her forefinger into the tea. 'Go on, stir it.'

'It's too hot,' she protested, resisting. Only the tip of her finger grazed the tea.

'Now you know the way I feel about you,' he replied.

'Then I'd better keep away or I might get scalded.'

He lowered his voice. 'I won't hurt you, kid. Jump right in.'

'I wouldn't fit in a tea-cup.'

He let her go, and she looked round for her cloth; but he took her hand again and licked her finger. 'I could eat you up, beautiful.'

'You're daft this morning. What's bit you?'

He smiled his broad easy smile. 'Dunno, sometimes I'm like this and sometimes I'm not. Must be the way the wind is.' Then he frowned. 'And I had a bit of bad luck yesterday. Somebody pinched my green sweater.'

'Oh, not that lovely one?'

'Yes, that identical one. I put it down for five minutes and off it walked. One of the chaps from the Indian boat, I suppose. You see, they aren't given any money when they're in port, and so you can hardly blame 'em for winning a thing here and a thing there.'

'They go and pawn them?'

'You guessed first time.' He drained his tea, tea-leaves and all, 'Now I'd better nip back. I left the others at the mobile canteen, nibbling cheese rolls. Maudie, would you mind putting your head in a biscuit-tin under the counter while I say good-bye to Phyl.'

'I'm not looking,' said Maudie. 'I've seen things like you before. Good-bye, you canteen-lizard.'

'That was my twin who's always getting me into trouble,' said Jeff. He took Phyl's face between his hands and kissed her.

Mrs Mulready had a wooden panel in her lap and a piece of smooth hard wood in her hand. 'I spilt the beads,' she said. 'They're all over the place. And it's so cold.'

'Do you want me to pick 'em up?' asked Phyl. She was getting tired of crawling over the floor for Mrs Mulready's beads, probably she spilt them on purpose.

'Yes, please, sweetheart.'

Rolling her stockings down below her knees, Phyl went stooping and crawling round the room. Some of the beads were under the bed, others under the gramophone. When she looked up, she found Mrs Mulready watching her with bright bird-eyes. 'I think I've got 'em all now.'

'Bring me over the soap and flannel, and I'll wash your knees,' said Mrs Mulready. 'You're all dirty again.'

I suppose I might go a bit dotty, too, if I was crippled, thought Phyl, and softened. All the same, she's about dotissima. She sits here thinking up silly things to make herself feel less bored. If she gets amusement out of washing my knees, I don't see why I should grudge her. Besides, she'll give me some chocolate in a moment.

Then came the rush-hour. The men were working hard, harder every day. She knew it by Matt's tiredness, the drawn faces of the men as they ate. The dockers were toiling all-out, battling with the terrible frost and ice that made heavy work ten times heavier, more dangerous. Working twelve hours a day, if you counted in the two travel-hours. Sometimes she felt a sullen rage in the men, as if they fought the elements in order to show the employers what they were capable of. Saying: If we can beat hell let loose in frost and snow and ice, do you divisions we can't take you in our stride, you lot of toy-Hitlers? National it? Right, you just watch us. Here's your pork and here's your jokes like that au your beef and here's your butter. So what about it? P.L.A. and not P.L. ner, jabbing a fork into the table top: 'Two disputes Maudie had tak ped aboard. What do you think we are? I said. Two Daily Forecast. 'I the same hold, and anything liable to happen to the

ones down below. . . . Slippery as a greased pig. . . . No, we won't do it, I said. We'll risk our lives when there isn't any choice, but here you've just got to use your brains. And next moment I find they're putting us on day-work, loading those heavy cases of machinery. This ought to be by the tonnage, I says. . . .

'And what'd he say to that?

'He gave in. He had to. First he said he'd report me to the Port Manager, then we got ready to go off, and he gave in.'

'Cripes, you should have been on the *Jencho*. Drums of formaldehyde, and they'd been leaking all the voyage. There was a hatchful of fumes that made you spew or gave you a splitting head.'

'Put in for extra pay?

'What do you think we are?

'Well, you can buy me a pint when you get it.'

Matt grinned. 'Do you know why foremen are like a bunch of bananas? They're green at first, then they go yellow, and there's not a straight one in the bunch.'

Behind him a crinkly nosed man was saying, 'Yes, it was a cushy job, but after two days of it I asked the gaffer for my book back.

"What for?" he asks. So I told him I felt fit and wanted to go back to my own foreman. "Who?" says he. "Don't you know him?" says I. "He's the Commodore of the Chief Stevedore's Sailing Fleet."

She felt as if the dockers were a class, a nation, a people apart. The docks were their homeland which had been conquered by an enemy; and the P.L.A. police were the outward expression of the enemy occupation. Daily the men poured in and out again, coming up from the outer areas as if from scattered crannies and lairs; they poured in, armies of them, and they had only to turn on the enemy and the homeland would be theirs. But instead they flung themselves on the ships, loaded or unloaded them, carried bales and sacks and cases of all sorts to and fro in a mad scurry, clearing the docks and littering them again. And thus the forces that might have given them back their birthright were dissipated daily, yet reborn every night in the scattered homes, in the silence of the night, in dreams and songs and pub laughter and beds of love. To pour in again, and still never regain the lost homeland. And yet, after having worked out this comparison, she felt it was wrong; nobody could think of the dockers as themselves conquered. They owned the docks; but only in the moments of striking, when they left the docks empty, did they directly express their power. Some day, she felt, they would express that power inside the docks. And then. . .

One day as she was passing the Victoria Dock Gate with Matt, he pointed to a small building inside. 'See that, the Sector Office. That's what caused the strike in forty-five.'

She stared at it. 'Why?'

'The control-point where attendance is proved used to be out here, two huts. Then they took the huts down and tried to make us assemble inside.'

'And why didn't you like it?'

'They wanted us under the P.L.A. police, and they wanted to stop us smoking.'

'And who won?'

'We did, in my opinion. But it isn't always so simple to reckon up your gains and losses. You can lose a strike and win it. Everything depends on how it leaves the men. If it leaves 'em beaten and broken down, you've lost. If it leaves 'em readier than ever to fight back, you've won. That's how I see it.' They walked on, and he said, 'I'd like you to meet Ted Dickens. I'll bring him along some time.'

23

Yorkshire

THE RUSTY OLD PARAFFIN-STOVE had obviously been fished out of a lumber-room to heat the dingy little café, a smell of hot tin and paraffin filled the place. Jill stubbed out her cigarette against the top of her matchbox and yawned. 'Well, what are we going to do?'

'I don't see the point of asking that,' demurred Dan, wrinkling up his freckled forehead. 'I thought we agreed there's nothing we can do at all.'

'I can't help feeling there's something. . . . It's just that we're stupid. They've got us bluffed.'

'It's a lock-out,' said Bessy. 'But don't take it so to heart, lass. We always lose and we never lose. You'll learn that when you're my age.' She gave Jill a kindly glance. 'Aye, and you'll be a terror then, making ten times the noise I do, and I'm louder than most.'

'I went along to the Union this morning,' said Dan, 'but they're all dithering and blithering. The chap I got hold of kept on stalling. He only had one idea in his head. They'll try to use all this trouble, he says, they'll try to turn people against the government.'

'What'd he say about a mass-meeting?' asked the small dark man, Mellor.

'Tell me how to hold it without freezing to death. That's all he said.'

'Why was he stalling?' asked Jill.

'I'm no mind-reader,' said Dan, giving her a look of appeal. 'Only wish I was. But it's my opinion he was just stalling—hadn't a clue.'

'I still feel we ought to do something,' Jill replied. The others watched her. She lighted another cigarette and stared at the cheese-cakes in the fly-specked glass case. 'Let's get at it another way. What's the basic issue?'

'Socialism or Fabian Imperialism,' said Dan. 'All along the line. Ever since the government took charge.'

'Okay,' said Jill, 'and what we've got now is the first real bit of crisis as things jam. Nature's pushed in with the frost to underline it; but if we don't look out, she'll provide Attlee and Morrison with the alibi they're after. Either the crisis brings about a jump into socialism or a decisive setback.'

'Ever since I can remember,' said Bessy, 'we've been jumping and having setbacks. Whoops, honey! It'll happen again.'

'No, it hasn't happened here before. The workers have a chance to take charge and show they can run things. If we mess it, we'll come out the other side of the crisis with all our positions worsened. And then anything may happen.'

'You're right,' said Dan, frowning nervously. 'But we've got a worse barrier than the police keeping us out—this damned frost. The power's here,' he struck himself on the chest, 'but not in the machines.'

'It's all worked out so neat,' said Mellor, 'you'd think it was thought up.'

Bessy yawned and stood up. 'No use brooding. I'm going home to see what junk I can still find in the shed that'll burn.'

Mellor went off with her. For a moment Dan didn't turn and look at Jill, then he flushed slightly to find her eyes fixed questioningly upon him. 'You're looking pale,' she said. 'And thinner, too.'

'What's it matter?' he said after a while. 'Have another cup?'

She wrinkled up her nose. 'Bilge.'

They sat silently, half-musing, half-listening to the two men at the next table. 'Doing well? I should say he is. He does just enough work not to make things too obvious. The charge-hands don't say owt.'

'He gives 'em a nip or two, I suppose.'

'That's how it's done. They turn a blind eye when he goes round with the betting tickets and takes the money for the bookie.'

'A smart lad, he'll go far.'

'Aye, quod or Millionaires' Row.'

'You got to take your chances.'

'He told me he's already lost fifty quid or more through the frost.'

The waitress, a lean girl with black straight hair, came in and spread her hands to the stinking oil-stove. 'The cold out there hits you on the

head like a chopper,' she said. 'Somebody was saying the earth's axis has slipped and the North Pole now runs through Glasgow; but I couldn't make out if he was serious or not.' The two men turned to her, and she went on, 'My aunt had a dozen fowls all frozen to their roost, and only this morning we found a dead dog on our doorstep. I'm sure I heard him scratching outside last night, poor creature, but it was too cold to go and see.'

'It's Russian weather,' said one of the men.

'Don't you believe it,' said Jull, getting up. 'It's the result of freezing sterling credits to suit the Americans.'

Dan followed her out. They stood swaying at the buffet of cold in the street. Dan hesitated, and then said, 'What about coming along to my room? It's no chillier than anywhere else.'

She answered slowly, 'Thanks, Dan, no.'

He flushed and looked away. 'It's that Kit, I suppose.'

She half-smiled. 'I suppose it is.'

'Oh well, good luck to him.'

'Don't be too noble, Dan. It sounds peevish.' She took his arm and they walked off down the street. 'I'm in a bit of a mess. I don't know where I am. . . . Now don't go jumping to conclusions. I just don't know where I am. I'm trying to get a bit of peace and quiet inside, so I can decide. . . .'

'About him?'

'About him, and about some others, too—not to mention myself.'

He replied with a slight bitterness, 'I don't need any peace and quiet, inside or outside, to know what I feel. . . . But I've said all that before, and I don't want to bore you.'

'It wouldn't bore me, but this isn't the time and place to say it.' He said nothing, and she went on, 'I owe a lot to you, Dan.'

'Sounds like an obituary,' he remarked harshly.

'You make me feel pretty low,' she said in a sinking voice.

They walked on in silence to the corner, then she stopped and turned him round to face her. He stared into her eyes, then looked away. 'All right, good-bye,' he muttered.

'Please don't be stupid, Dan,' she pleaded, and drew him back into a doorway. She hugged him and held up her mouth to be kissed. He hesitated, looking down, and then bent to her mouth. After a while she pushed him gently away. 'Now go home and don't be stupid. I meant neither more nor less than what I said. . . . I've got to stand on my feet for a while and take a good look at myself.'

She smiled at him, and walked off without looking back. He watched her down the street, till she had turned the corner, then he closed his eyes, passed his hand over his brow, and shook his head. A car was

coming cautiously down the roadway. As it neared him, the driver let down the window. 'Where's number fifty-three of this confounded street?' he asked. 'I can't see a single number.' He added, 'Mrs Embury.'

Dan shook his head, but started down the street in quest of number 53. After a while he found a faded 47 painted on a fence, and beckoned. The car rolled slowly up. 'Here's forty-seven,' he called.

The man got out with a black bag and locked his car. 'I'll try the fourth up,' he said. 'If I don't find her soon, she'll be having the baby all on her own.' He nodded with a pleasant smile.

Dan watched him knock at the door. The right house, evidently, for he went straight in. Dan turned and walked past again. No sound, no sign. But behind the drab façade a woman was in the throes of childbirth, and a new life was waiting to struggle out into the difficult light. Quickening his pace, Dan walked on and somehow he felt better.

Jill paused a moment before she went in. Her aunt was sitting in the wickerwork arm-chair by the pallid fire, with a brown, lumpy dressing-gown over her clothes. 'I can't get warm, no matter what,' she complained. 'And you do nothing but run round on fool's-errands. I'd have thought such a judgment would have drummed some sense into your head.'

'How are you feeling?' Jill asked, knowing what the answer would be.

'Much worse. I felt dreadful after you went and left me all alone; but luckily Mrs Brinson came in to borrow a saucepan, and I asked her to ring the doctor. But he hasn't come.'

'There's a lot of people ill these days,' said Jill, hanging her coat on the back of the door. 'I'll make some tea.'

'But he ought to come here first. He knows I've been ill longer than the others. He ought to have some consideration.'

Jill bustled about, to get a little warmth into her bones, to avoid her aunt's querulous questions and her own disturbed thoughts. She couldn't help feeling that there was something she'd failed to realise about the political situation, some point that would enable her to give a different sort of lead. All the weavers were so depressed, wondering if they'd get their jobs back and how long they'd be laid off, or fretting at cold and sickness and lack of food. And beyond that, yet mixed up with it, was her personal problem. Kit and Dan and . . . Oh, she shook her head stubbornly and brushed her hair back with her hand. She liked Kit in a way, but something in him always got her back up; she seemed acting a part with him all the while. It'd be good if he really did come over. . . . She pulled herself up. There I am, finding a political

excuse for something quite personal. Or am I? Aren't I always saying you can't separate the two? Somehow she seemed caught in her own trap as soon as she thought of Kit or talked to him. Does that mean there's something false, after all, in my attitudes? she anxiously asked. Am I just a phoney with him, or am I more myself than with the others? Anyway, he always seemed to challenge her, to set her on her mettle. What would a love affair with him be like? The same challenge carried into the most intimate matters? That might be good for both of them; it might be phoney and futile. She just couldn't tell in her present frame of mind, chilled and constricted.

'What's happened to that nice young man?' her aunt was asking, as if she read her thoughts. 'I suppose you frightened him off with your politics.'

'Nothing happened,' said Jill absently, crossing her arms over her breasts and rubbing the upper part of each arm. 'He's all right.'

She couldn't banish the thought that there was something wrong in her personal life and its attitudes. Look at Dan now. He'd disappointed her. She'd thought him a strong character, and there hadn't been any pretences. . . . But all the while he had seemed to demand something more, becoming miserable in the process; and now, in this wretched crisis, he seemed to have lost all power of leadership, waiting on events and on her. She had a guilty feeling that she was somehow responsible for this weakening of his fibres; there was something wrong in the premises of their relationship, which she couldn't or wouldn't grasp. I'm not afraid, she told herself, I'm not afraid. But it didn't help. She felt a force driving her on, like a strong wind pressing on her shoulder-blades, and she couldn't turn her head to look back.

'Little Pansy came in and said her mother is down with congested chest,' said Mrs Wethers, fingering her stringy throat and coughing. 'At least I've been spared that so far—touch wood.' She fondled the broom-handle standing against the wall. 'And last week she looked in here, bursting with health, to show how she pined me.' She sighed with a faintly superior smile. 'Ah, how true it is we all of us straddle our grave—though the young can't believe it.' Her chair creaked like an echo of her dry monitory voice.

AS HE TURNED the corner, he ran into the very last men he wanted to meet, Jack Benson and his mate Saul. 'Hullo, Jack,' he said heartily,

trying to make the best of a bad job, and nodded to Saul, 'what are you doing out at this time of the day?'

'Our time's our own,' said Benson, whose scar looked livid in the chilly light.

'Not another mass-meeting?' asked Emery, trying to give his voice the right note of commiseration without any sarcasm. 'Now you'll begin to know some of the sufferings of us chaps.'

'I don't know about that,' said Benson, 'we aren't paid for it.'

Emery tried to laugh it off. 'You know what I mean, Jack. I bet you're cursing the meeting in your heart of hearts. There's nothing you can say, and everyone will yell as if it's your fault.'

Benson grimaced. 'If we haven't much to tell the boys, it's the Union's fault for failing to lay down a line.'

'I don't see that,' replied Emery, wondering how soon he could get away. 'What kind of line do you expect? A sermon rebuking the snow? There's nothing we can do but wait till the frost breaks and enough coal gets round for power to start again.' He gave a wry grin. 'Sometimes I think you chaps must be hard put to tell whether to blame the boss or the Union for every act of God that lands on you.'

Saul butted in. 'Has the Executive issued a single directive since the crisis began?'

'This isn't an industrial dispute'—Emery heard the irritated note in his voice, and spoke more quietly—'though it'll end in a whole string of 'em. That's why I'm glad you chaps are on the job and keeping everyone wide-awake to the problems that'll come up as soon as there's resumption.'

'That's just where the Union ought to be doing some thinking.'

'And of course it is—from my level right up to the top storey.'

'We'd like some signs of it.'

'You want to rush things. The great thing in a battle is to know the right time to throw your full weight in.'

Saul broke the pause. 'What you said about keeping the problems before the boys made me want to laugh, brother. When a man's out of work and shivering with cold and counting the last spud in the larder, he don't need much prodding to know he's got an economic problem on his doorstep.'

'Of course he'll yell out,' Emery agreed. 'What I meant is that you've got to make him see sense....'

His remark petered out, and neither of the others took him up, though he felt an increasing antagonism in them. All right, he thought, if that's the way you want it. He coughed, and they walked on together in silence. Emery slithered a bit on a specially glassy patch of pavement, and had to grasp Benson's arm. 'Whoa,' said Benson.

'It's all right,' Emery replied in annoyance. 'There's one thing. You chaps have got the duty of seeing that the employers don't use the crisis and the sackings to work up feeling against the government.' The others merely grunted a response, and then, as they turned the corner and came in sight of the gates of the works, he risked saying, 'You wouldn't like me to come in with you?'

He felt sure that Saul nudged Benson, and at last Benson said, 'Of course, come in if you've got anything definite. Nothing we'd like better.'

'I'd only say the same as you will—nothing much, well wrapped-up,' said Emery, feeling at last that he'd got them down. 'And it happens I have some rather urgent business elsewhere. See you soon.'

He waved his hand and walked off—too fast. Only with an effort that left a crick in the small of his back did he save himself from skidding again. That would have been the last straw if he'd floundered about and toppled on his bottom in front of their grinning faces. Very carefully he picked his way, keeping close to the wall.

'I've learned a lot from watching that bastard,' observed Saul.

'Hard to believe it,' said Benson, 'he was a good man once.'

'That makes it all the clearer we've got to watch our own steps, every one of us. I don't suppose anyone really believes he can go bad.'

'It's the first steps that count, there and everywhere else.'

They turned in at the gates and made for the big hulk of the canteen building. 'Do you think the employers have got a definite contract among themselves not to steal each other's best workers?' asked Saul.

'Bet your life. They don't leave much to chance. When it comes to Brother Emery's acts of God, they always like to have deeds of partnership signed up with the Lord.'

They overtook a group of six workers also making for the canteen. The others nodded affably and made various friendly comments. Benson grinned and nodded. 'All white-collars,' he said to Saul in a lowered voice. 'Talk about unity of the workers! Why, everyone's got the bullet. Even the chief of the planning department and the contacts chap have taken to calling me by my first name.'

'You'd have thought the employers would have discriminated more. It's a gift, this solidarity.'

Benson grinned. 'You'll learn, Saul. You've got to distrust gifts when they come from certain quarters. I don't think there's much that isn't calculated in all this.'

'I sometimes think you give the Employers' Federation too much credit for foresight,' Saul demurred.

'I never said they're intelligent,' replied Benson. 'It's a sort of low

cunning. It works like one o'clock up to a certain point. Then the contradictions of the system come in.

They went into the canteen, nodding to the two men on the door. The interior was so dark that at first they couldn't see anything. No lights. A kind of clammy dark that stunned them. They stood still a moment, to get their bearings, and then edged down along the wall, towards the dais. There was already a large crowd there, standing about or seated on the benches and chairs. A girl gave a low scream, and someone shouted, 'Behave yourself over there!'

Benson bumped against the dais and got up on to it. Someone flashed a torch. He stood for a moment, looking down into the huge room. He could just make out a mass of vague faces. A man over on the left struck his lighter, and the people round him momentarily showed up—an old fellow with his head back and his eyes closed, a lad leaning forward to whisper something to a girl, a man with his cap well pulled down, a woman rummaging in her bag. Then the light went out, and the cavernous darkness returned, once more slowly revealing the glimmering rows on rows. Never had it been so easy to get such well-attended meetings. Everyone was eaten up with anxiety about his job, the clerks and the staff officials as much as the men on the bench and the girls on the belt. Nobody knew what was happening, but they were all scared. Perhaps the ceaseless pressure of the frost played its part. And they all wanted action. There were even some who called for a strike! A strike against what? We're locked-out, boys. The guaranteed-week scheme has gone west, the very first time there was any need to apply it. That's shaken everyone.

'What about starting?' someone shouted from below.

There was a shout of agreement, and some lads at the back began stamping and clapping their hands. Wally Keith came up behind Benson. 'We may as well,' he said, and stood forward with his hands cupped to his mouth. His stentorian voice quieted the noise-makers, and he opened the meeting. Benson had to admit that Emery had uttered a home-truth when he jeered about saying nothing in chosen words. The listeners wanted to know when work would be started and to be assured they'd personally get their jobs back; and there was nothing to say but vague generalisations, with appeals for patience and solidarity.

Waiting for his turn, he stared out at the vague rows of faces and found his thoughts wandering. 'They got all the coal they wanted in the war, didn't they?' someone shouted from a row near the front, and he thought he recognised the voice. How much could you say outright about the correct policy to follow? Not much. That was bad, in a way. Made a man afraid he was going the Emery road. But there

was no getting away from the facts. Ensure that the shop-stewards got back, and then everyone else would get back too—or as many as were actually possible. Let the militants be sacrificed and the employers would do just as they liked with the rest. But if you thought that aloud, you'd be accused of working for yourself first.

'We're already discussing lists,' Keith was saying in his rough below that filled the vast gloom and seemed to set the endless rows of faces wavering and blinking. 'We stand for a hundred per cent. resumption—and at the earliest date possible . . . We stand for both sides getting together to discuss the ways and means of resumption in the shortest possible time. . . . But you've got to remember that starting off a big engineering works isn't like turning on the wireless. . . .'

Another thing, thought Benson, a showdown like this brought out where the source of power lay. All the smug-nosed intermediaries were out. You went straight in to the big boss. You came to the point, and you butted your head on the brick wall of his damned unconcern. The State, the T U , the whole phoney apparatus of arbitration and adjustment—it all ceased to exist. There was nothing left but the king-boss face to face with the workers' direct representative.

Keith was finishing, calling on Benson, and Benson groaned to himself. Now I've got to say the same things in different words. And standing there, on the edge of the dais, and staring down into the vast hollow darkness, he found it difficult to pitch his voice. His first words sounded unresonant, flat. With an effort he raised his voice and shouted, and the mass of faces seemed to ripple and flow, to increase in number, and the dim perspective opened out indefinitely, an horizonless tunnel of obscurity as murmurous as a sea-shell.

Lancashire

IF YOU WERE in the thick of it yourself, you knew what the others were doing and feeling, even if you only had a hint—a half-noted headline in a paper, a half-sentence caught from the drawling radio. Coal coming up from the pit at a pace that had never been known before. Coal piling up at the pitheads, millions of tons of coal. But railway wagons stranded, lost under snow, shunted into sidings. Fields and tracks five feet deep or more under the snow. And railwaymen working day and night to get the coal moving, radiating out from the pitheads and the sidings, all over Britain. Soldiers with bulldozers and snow-ploughs. Workers volunteering to clear snow from buried lornies.

Twelve thousand workers in a big Sheffield steel plant vote to go without heating in a temperature under zero. Woolwich Arsenal carriage-department volunteer, men and women, to double production of steel coal-wagons. And double it. Women at Lowestoft, dress-making, take materials from the workshops and carry on at home. Disused rail-tracks cleared by the men in South Wales, round Brynmawr, and used for lumbering work trains. Cottages half-sunk in snow, with smoky oil-lamps turned low and tinned food doled out. Welsh miners volunteering for Sunday work. Coal ships sailing from the Tyne through heavy seas, rolling and pitching for three days, forging ahead with steam-pipes iced and broken. Through the coal-filmed water to the piers with mechanical grabs that rattle on heavy chains into the holds, open their steel-toothed jaws, bite deep into the soft coal, and swing up fifty feet to the top of the hopper. Open with swish and roar, to feed the conveyer belt and the second hopper, and fill the trains for the big retort houses that extract the gas.

Miners, railwaymen, sailors, dockers. Under their steady and relentless attack on the wintry barrier, Britain revives.

Climbing on a tram, he tapped the roof to see how solid it sounded. 'Okay.' Yes, but many of the cross-stick collars were broken. One was tightly wedged in something. It wouldn't be safe to knock too hard, might bring the roof down. A high roof here, blast it. Give me a six-foot roof, easy to walk under, easy to reach for repairs. But this was ten-foot if an inch. How the devil was he to measure up the length of the new collar, taking into account the distance from the roof and the bends in the bloody post? His mate Ted was below, at work with the extending stick.

Better, anyway, than the job last week with the buckled steel arches. The fastening plates jerking away like mad when the bolts came off, and if you were in the way, you'd had it. His hand was still plastered from a cut of rusty iron.

They were just getting the ten-footer post right when the fireman came running their way. One of the stall roads was giving danger-signals; and if something wasn't done quickly, the airways would go shut.

Ted knew the road. 'No use taking this ten-footer along, but we've got two seven-foots back here.' He and Dick ran to get hold of the posts and drag them towards the roadway, aided by Tim, who had now come up. When they got there, Ted took a look, went half-way over with his stick and came back. 'They'll need a foot off.'

'A whole bloody foot?'

'Yeh, a whole bloody foot.'

'Something's happening down along,' said the fireman, keeping on the safe side. A stone fell. Something screamed. 'A rat, only a stinking rat,' said the fireman reassuringly.

Then the roof-fall began roaring down. They scurried back, out of range, deafened and stifled with the dust. 'That's torn it,' said Tim. 'The airway's blocked.'

'It might be worse,' said Dick.

For four hours they scrambled and dug and shifted heavy stones, listening all the while for new falls. Climbed over heaps of broken shale, wriggled under broad slabs, dodged back to escape fresh falls of the roof. Nothing big happened again or they'd have been beaten. Desperately they got a couple of posts up, and then had another roof fall six feet away. In the dim light they could make out huge jagged stones hanging overhead.

And no sooner had they done the job and kept the airway open than another fall occurred farther on, smashing a truck and killing a rider.

They couldn't hope to get proper timbering up, but they aimed at keeping the road clear, however narrowly, so that later a more secure cover could be fixed. A rush of small stones bruised Dick's shoulder and knocked Tim under one of the larger slabs. They cleared the rubble away as fast as they could, aware all the while of a big rough-edged lump hanging loosely right overhead. A stone falling behind crushed Dick's lamp and buried a mandril.

They got Tim out with a broken leg.

'And I said I'd play the cornet in the band on Sunday,' he complained before he fainted.

The trouble hadn't had anything to do with the speed-up, but coming at the moment it did, it stood out in Dick's mind as a climax.

Next day he had a long argument with his father, putting forward the points he'd heard Frank Wilson make. 'The monopolists need cheap coal and cheap transport. The government has to nationalise these two industries to subsidise the ones that bring in the big profits. . . .' But he was a bit afraid of the points as he heard himself trot them out. Logically, they implied that the government was a better tool of the monopolies than the Tones themselves; and if so, why did the employers hate it! However, he couldn't help bawling his father, in order to try to find out his own thoughts.

Part of him was proud and keen about the nationalisation, feeling it a triumph of the miners; another part didn't think much of it at all, simply sensing a change of bosses. The new boss was probably more efficient and sensible on the whole than the past one; he couldn't be less so. Because, after all, he had something of an over-all view and

could concentrate on the more obvious possibilities of the mines, discarding the weaker pits and more briskly carrying on a policy of mechanisation. But that wasn't what the miners had fought for; it wasn't what his father was claiming they'd won. And yet, despite his father's view-point as he liked, he still felt something right about it.

His mind ended by going stale on the subject, and he shelved the discussion—with some difficulty, as his father wanted to go on until he'd extorted full agreement. I'll go and see if Joan's at home, he thought. But Alice came in, full of complaints as usual, and somehow he felt sick of women.

'Stop bothering mother,' he said. 'Can't you see she's got enough worries of her own these days?'

'I'm not bothering her,' she retorted. 'Am I, mum?'

'No, no,' said Mrs Baxter. 'I only wish you two wouldn't fight.'

'You see, it's you that's bothering her.' She turned to her mother. 'Isn't Alison Bumpus unlucky? She was going to be married on Thursday, and now Charley can't get leave from his ship. I'm sure I'd never marry a sailor.'

Dick decided to go to the pub, cold as it was.

When he arrived, Willy Hilton was holding forth. Willy had had a bad fracture; and Mr Henderson had managed to get him sent to Sandiway Rehabilitation Centre, where he'd stayed four months. 'What'd you do besides learning how to make bedside lamps?' Mike asked, as they sat on benches round a fire of old half-decayed wood.

'Cost about tenpence to make, and you can sell 'em for five bob each.'

'If you're lucky.'

Willy went on talking about the men he'd met at Sandiway. 'Now there was Eric Hills. He'd been in a Durham pit before he went to North Wales; and he told me a right queer tale of his old pit. When they first had pithead baths put in, hardly any of the men'd use 'em. So at last the wives all got together and hatched up a strike of their own. One day when the shift comes off, not a man's let into his home unless he's had a bath at the pithead. They cursed and they swore, but they had to troop back and wash before the door was opened.'

'They were right, too,' said Old Andy. 'A woman's hand scrubbing your back kept the rheumatiz away.'

'That's not what they said,' remarked Willy. 'They said they were too bashful to undress before one another.'

'They were just lazy,' said Mike.

'Well, whatever it was, they had to get used to the baths and come home clean.' Willy chuckled. 'It must have been a sight, the whole village of 'em banging on their doors and having to sneak back to the pithead!'

'I'd have bust the door,' said Alex. 'I'd have smashed the kitchen window. I'd have climbed down the chimney and seen how she liked soot as well as coal-dust on the floor.'

He glared round furiously and caught Dick's eye. Dick winked and lifted his glass.

London

THE DOCKERS WERE mostly working day-in day-out, only stopping for Saturday afternoons. Maudie and Phyl were taking it in turns to serve on Sundays. Not that being at home gave Phyl any free time. The feud between the Bantings had broken down when both Herb and the young Banting girl got bad chills, but the illness in the families meant extra work. Tremaine, penned at home by the frost, had relapsed into his fears, and he too was feverish in bed. Nell wasn't well, and neither was Pearl. Any hope of visiting Bette again receded.

'Is it ever going to stop?' Mrs Tremaine asked continually. Pipes burst in the house, and the lavatory, always ramshackle, went out of order. There was only a filthy little place in the freezing backyard, which had to be cleared by pouring water down from buckets, or the public lavatories three blocks away. 'We'll get a plumber when the moon turns green cheese,' said Mrs Tremaine. The Hubbards in the basement were flooded out with a burst water-pipe, and their seven children were shared out among the other families.

'We've all took the wrong turning,' croaked Tremaine miserably from his bed. 'It's a judgment.'

The gas-fire burned so feebly it was a mockery of a flame, and if you didn't watch it, it was liable to go out and then the gas came on again and killed you. Every crack in the room was crammed with newspaper or putty and pasted over with brown paper, and the gas couldn't escape. The Pringles were caught like that, and their girl, only two days back from hospital, died. Phyl couldn't keep warm, though she put on almost all her clothes at night.

She went with Mrs Rugsby to get some coke from the gasworks, with an old pram and a sack. 'We've burned every bit of wood except the cages, and half my poor little birds are dead. Oh, it's pitiful to see 'em with their feet sticking up.'

The queue, four deep, stretched for more than a hundred yards down the street. As soon as two left, three joined. 'My old man came along

at four-thirty this morning when he knocked off his shift, and the queue was here then,' said a woman two rows ahead.

'And it goes on to past midnight,' said another.

The women, huddled in old coats with any woollen thing for a muffler, shivered at the blasts of piercing wind. 'Oh well, I suppose we're lucky to get anything,' said a third speaker.

'You mean lucky to be allowed to live,' said the first. 'Lucky be damned! We're gutless fools, if that's what you mean. When they kick us on one cheek, we lift up our skirts and offer 'em the other.'

'I didn't mean no harm.'

'I feel that savage,' the first one went on. 'I don't trust myself. If I was to go down the West End and smell those smells that come up from the grating outside the restaurants, I'd do something drastic.'

'How much will they give us?' asked a fat woman in a worn rabbit-coat.

'Your first time?' said the talkative one. 'Where have you been living? Buckingham Palace? You get a quarter hundredweight. If you're very mean with it, it'll last you a day, and then you come back here to shiver and shake.'

'I was told a hundredweight,' complained the rabbit-skin.

'You're too old to listen to Father Christmas. You weren't born yesterday, were you?'

Up towards the gates was a brazier with children crouching round it. The queue moved slowly forward, with its motley crowd of prams, barrows, sacks, handcarts, trolleys. Those who had got their quarter hundredweight went cheerfully by, greeted with comments. 'Don't look so proud as if you dug it yourself' or 'Chuck us a nut, dearie, and I'll chew it.'

After about two hours, Mrs Rigsby and Phyl found themselves near the gate. Maddeningly there was a hitch of some sort, and they had to wait half an hour till new supplies of coke were brought up. Phyl took the pram and Mrs Rigsby the sack, and then when they had been given their share and moved on, Mrs Rigsby stuck the sack in the pram and insisted on doing the pushing. 'That makes a half, hooray.' She lowered her voice: 'I wasn't half windy when I heard that man talking to the policeman, some sort of official he was, I think. Half of the people here are just professional queuers, he says, the one's you see in the cake queue. I was afraid the lady who wanted to do someone in would hear him.' But Phyl had been too stupefied with cold to see or hear anything. Mrs Rigsby went on, 'Now you must come home and have the strongest cup of tea I ever made, and a bit of shortbread, too. You're the only one that can cheer Pearl up out of the dumps.'

So Phyl listened to Pearl's grumbings, feeling the hot tea course

through her veins and eating the shortbread as slowly as possible. She told Pearl a bit about the docks, but Mrs Mulready was the only person connected with Silvertown who interested her. 'Her husband must be a good chap, sticking to her like that. He washes her and does everything, you say? There's not many like him. I bet that Maudie of yours threw herself at him pretty hard; she must have come back with a bump.'

'He plays a lot of snooker, and he goes to all the boxing matches.'

'He's got to get rid of it some way,' said Pearl, mystifying Phyl.

'How crippled is she? Are both her legs broken? Are her hips broken? And what about her spine?'

'I think it's one leg,' said Phyl. 'Yes, her right thigh and hip.'

'I think a woman's made in a ridiculous way,' Pearl burst out. 'It isn't fair. Oh, if I was only a man, I'd never leave 'em alone.'

'No, you wouldn't,' said Phyl. 'Because you only feel like that because you aren't one.' A knotty point they debated at length till it ended inconsequentially with Pearl deciding to take up bead-mosaics.

Maudie always read the Missing Relatives and Unclaimed Money sections in the *News of the World*. So far she hadn't found any Parrotts named, but once or twice she had found a locality, and once a street, where her family had lived. She was extremely worried by the idea of piles of Unclaimed Money lying about, mostly in the offices of solicitors who'd embezzle it after a while. Then she noticed a Marrett. Listen: Will Mary Agnes Marrett, sister of Anne Bernard, deceased, last heard of in 1916 when a nurse at Weymouth or Dorchester Military Hospital, and thought to have left for the United States or Chile, or her next of kin, communicate with Jenkun Hugginbottoms and Jenkin, Wigan.'

'But Marrett isn't Parrott.'

'No, but father was an awful speller. Mums says he spelt my name Muddie in the registry office. He might easily have spelt Marrett with a P, especially if he'd had a few pints. I'm sure this is our family. I'm going to write to Wigan; and if I get a fortune, I'll buy you a hundred pounds' worth of clothes.' Maudie was naturally generous, but she always had a feeling that if she promised to give a lot of the Unclaimed Money away it would placate the jealous gods and advance her hopes.

Matt came bursting in. 'Phyl, Phyl, where are you?'

'Here I am!' she cried, frightened. 'Can't you see me?'

'Come along.'

She ran out after him without her coat, and Maudie followed her with it—or rather with her own coat she'd picked up in haste, a coat far too large for Phyl.

Phyl struggled into it and hurried to catch Matt up. He was making for the gate. An ambulance was there. With a quick sob she ran her fastest. 'What is it?' she panted.

'Jeff, he's hurt. He asked for you.'

She elbowed through the line of spectators. 'Let me in, let me in.' She felt sure that the ambulance would drive off before she had a chance to see Jeff. It always happened like that in the films. But the attendant stood aside and she looked in the end of the van. 'Oh, Jeff, what's happened?'

'Only broken my collar-bone or something,' he said, and the gasp, the shake in his voice, told her how hurt he was. He went on in lower tones, 'Bloody fool. My hook caught in the cage . . . I slipped . . . right down the hold. . . . Come and see me.'

'Of course I will. Oh, Jeff, I'm so sorry.'

'Don't go crying now or I'll be sorry I asked for you.' His voice trailed away again in pain.

'We'd better be going now, miss,' said the attendant, and got in by Jeff, closing the door. The van started off.

'Will he be all right, Matt?' Phyl asked, sobbing.

'He's tough, he'll be all right,' answered Matt. 'God, it's hell on those slippery decks.'

27

Yorkshire

HE WENT OUT the next day, well wrapped up. After so many days indoors he felt the shock of the cold air like the entry into a new dimension. His body was light under the clothes, difficult to control; and the harsh wintry world elated him. Death's other kingdom, he told himself; we are the hollow men. This is the way the world ends. An emotion of bitter contempt and loneliness upheld him.

He found he was moving without any clear intention in the direction of Jull's place. But the only familiar face he met was Rose's. They collided at a corner; and when he picked up her bag, she greeted him with a shout of pleasure. 'Ah, that was a lucky bump, eh?'

He took her arm, reluctant to wander on alone. 'Let's have a drink.'

'I can always find time for a good deed.'

They went into the nearest pub, into the parlour, where a green parrot stood disconsolately chained to a perch under a mouldy-leaved palm, saying now and then with evident scepticism, 'Pretty Polly.'

'I heard you were ill,' said Rose, 'and now I look at you, you do

seem a bit anatomical. That's the right word, isn't it? I'm always getting 'em wrong. Only an hour ago a stuck-up female asked me the way to some Tribunal or other, and I sent her down the Ladies. Honest, I thought she wanted it. I went down after her myself, which I wouldn't have done if I was putting one over. Don't you know the King's English? she says. No, I don't, I says, do you take me for Princess Margaret? I know Batley English, that's where I was dragged up. Stop your fratching, says the old lady with the clout. So I walked out with my penny in my hand. I can't abide those fluff-faffing women. Here's luck.'

Kit had a feeling she liked him, and that made him like her. She chattered on, not caring much whether he laughed with her or at her. How her father was laid up with a paralytic stroke, how her mother went charring most mornings, how her younger brother was so studious he read books he couldn't understand, how her elder brother would drink anything from *eau de Cologne* to half-and-half, and how the family boarder thought of nothing but saving up money to buy ties. Honest, he's got fifty.

He felt amiably thawed, half-asleep, with the parrot muttering now and then in his palm-leaves and the squat barmaid with black tightly-drawn hair and little side-curls that looked as if painted on, and Rose chattering in her harsh, warm voice. What on earth could she have in common with Dan, Jill, Wotton?

'You're not politically minded like Jill, for example'

'I'm twenty times more,' she protested 'She's learnt most of her politics out of books. Mine's in the marrow of my bones. Why, do you know, the 1925 lock-out in the woollen and worsted trades started on my tenth birthday? Father was one of them who knocked out the blacklegs under the railway bridge as they were going to Wordley Gasworks. Ma was there, too. They captured the bridge and poured tons of bricks down on the blacklegs. All day it went on, till the soldiers charged 'em. In those days the mill-owners kept dogs in the yards to turn on trade-union organisers. Father went down the rattle half a dozen times. They used to fine strikers, too, and jail 'em if they didn't pay. I remember how he spent Christmas Day in jail once; and when the grocer wouldn't give us anything on strap, we sucked our thumbs. Don't you think that's politics? Only a slice of treacle and half a turnip a day, and maybe a spoonful of reezed porridge when things went better.' She held out her hands. 'Aye, the frosts this year are bad enough, but do you think they're the first we've had? I've gone to work with bleeding fingers and knees many a time when I was in the mill, though it was only a few streets away—crawling on my hands and knees in the cruel ice. And what do you

think those who lived farther off had to go through? Don't you think that's politics?

He was astounded at the passion that suddenly burst from the good-humoured girl. But having got the declaration off her chest, she laughed, insisted on buying a pint, patted his hand, and said he'd live and learn. He had meant to turn the conversation on to Jill, and now was forced to make a direct attack. 'What's Jill doing?'

'Oh, running round as usual with her Dan and the rest of it. . . .'

'Her Dan? Why? Does he belong to her?'

'I didn't mean owt. Just a manner of speaking.'

'I like them both,' he said desperately. 'They'd make a good pair.' And when she asked him why he'd said it, he replied that he'd heard someone couple their names.

'Some folk'll say anything to pass the time. Regular lot of chit-chat-wallets they are.'

'You don't think there's anything in it?'

'It's their own affair. Jill's a good girl,' she said defensively, 'and she hasn't had an easy time either, her Doug being killed like he was.'

'I don't think I know about Doug.'

'You might say they were engaged. He was a fitter at Hasling's, a first-rate craftsman. The firm got his calling-up twice deferred, but he wanted to go all the time, and it seems such a waste, to get killed after the war was ended. An unexploded mine in Hamburg did it. I thought everyone knew all about him,' she concluded vaguely.

'Pretty Polly,' said the parrot with raucous sarcasm, and tried to scratch his head with a large scaly claw.

Kit drank and watched two smart lads with waved hair and Yankee suits, who had come in and started a pin-table game. Rose stretched and stood up. 'I'll leave you a moment for the Tribunal, love.' Someone turned up the radio in the public bar and a soprano voice screeched, eliciting a hoarse chuckle from the parrot. 'She wants the flue-brush before she starts singing,' said Rose, and went off.

I don't know anything, Kit thought, sitting alone in a dark despair. I don't know anything about anyone. I'm alone. He felt as if the world was receding, as if he wouldn't be able to reach the box of matches on the table in front of him.

A few of the permanent staff were recalled to the mill after the first week; in particular there were several designs to be completed. And so, after a 'phone talk with Wotton, Kit decided to turn up at the designing-room.

But he didn't find his thoughts any more settled, more easy to control and formulate, in the office. The world of snow, the frozen deathly

world outside the window and the hollow silence of the mill where no looms were clattering, weighed down his mind. How could he concentrate on the blue-squared paper before him? He didn't want to talk to Wotton about Jill, after all. What was his father up to? That most of all he wanted to know. Here, in the silenced mill, it was somehow a matter more menacing and pressing than even his doubts and hopes of Jill. The silence of the snow seemed the outward expression of his father's power, his determination to arrest the advancing movement of time and the workers, to hold the world in a dead stillness while he craftily rearranged things. What was going on at the heart of the stillness, the conspiratorial hush and the hidden voices? Were his father's schemes part of a larger plot and were they in turn tied up with the general black-market debasement of the internal system in Britain? And if so, what values were at stake? Were his father and the other industrialists being driven to mere banditry in defence of outworked exploitations, or were they fighting to maintain a way of life that owned certain necessary and absolute qualities? Was freedom a mockery in their mouths, or was it a true recall to forgotten or threatened virtues?

He felt the need to think out his position all over again from the ground upwards, and this need was painful. Above all, he wanted some certainty on which to rest. Something stable from which he could build up and out. To be driven back again and again to question and redefine the fundamentals of his outlook was too exhausting. He had reached the end of his tether. He must find where he stood.

As he was lighting a cigarette beside the portable oil-heater, he saw his father's car slowly move along the roadway in front of the mill. His father was in it, and someone else, presumably Bannister. Suddenly he thought: Here is the chance to end at least one section of my doubts.

He stubbed his cigarette, rose and went out, downstairs, to the large front rooms where his father had his office. The typist, Miss Smellie, smart and lean in her tailored grey costume, looked up with a careful smile. 'Good-day, Mr Swinton, your father's out.'

'Oh, is he?' Kit had forgotten she'd be there, but he felt that retreat was impossible. 'Doesn't matter. I only want some papers he promised to give me back. I won't be a moment.'

She looked blank, but he moved on past her desk and let himself into the inner room. There, he glanced round, then went to the left-hand drawers, which he knew held many of his father's personal papers. They were locked; and there were no keys on the desk-top or on the mantelpiece. What the devil did he expect? He turned over the papers in the *In* and *Out* trays, and gave another tug at the top left-hand drawer. The door opened and Bannister looked in. 'It's you, Kit?'

Kit disliked the familiar tone. 'Yes, Mr Bannister,' he replied coldly and sharply. 'Father's out, I find.'

'Yes,' said Bannister with his officious smile. 'Anything I can do for you?'

'I'll speak to father myself, thank you.'

Bannister stood back, with a polite grimace that was almost a smirk; and Miss Smellie gave the same impersonal efficient-secretary smile. Kit nodded and went out. Had she rung for Bannister? He'd have liked to turn and catch what sort of a glance they exchanged behind his back; but he walked on, checking in time the jaunty whistle that would have proclaimed his sense of guilt. Now he was sure he had done the wrong thing.

That night at dinner Mr Swinton seemed more sunk into himself than ever, he took no notice of his wife's vague complaints, let his soup go cold, and then called Aggie back with it. Ignoring Mrs Swinton's suggestion that it should be warmed up again, he drank half a plateful, then ejaculated, 'It's cold, take it away.' Diana regarded him with grave disfavour, but Margaret caught Kit's eye and had much trouble in checking a fit of the giggles. Bannister hasn't said anything, Kit thought. But at that moment Swinton felt for some papers in his breast pocket, and said without looking up, 'Come to my room in exactly an hour's time.' And though he mentioned no names, they all knew he meant Kit.

An hour later Kit knocked, took a deep breath, and entered. Someone had told him that actors took a deep breath before going on the stage, it aided self-confidence. Also he smiled, but felt that the smile gave him away, and tried to wipe it off, not soon enough.

His father waved him to a chair. 'What were you doing at my desk?' he asked without preliminaries.

Kit sat down before answering, determined to keep calm and speak slowly. 'I wanted a word with you.'

'I was out and you knew it.'

'You've never forbidden me your office.'

'That's casuistry. You were spying on me.'

'Why should I spy on you?'

'That's for you to answer.'

They were raising their voices, in a moment they'd shout and irrevocable things would be said. Kit suddenly realised that he was standing up to his father, that he wasn't afraid—or rather his fear was more than equalled by his anger. And this discovery eased him. 'I wasn't spying on you. The word spying suggests some ulterior motive, some further use to which information is to be put. I merely wanted

to know more about the firm, because in a sense it's my firm more than yours. If I'm to take it over later on, I'm the firm's future. And you've told me nothing, done nothing to bring me into the mill's inner workings.' He spoke firmly, enjoying the calm sound of his voice.

His father stared and replied emphatically but without the rising note of denunciation, 'In the first place, it'd be no use talking to you about those inner workings till you understand much more of the trade's nature and methods. Secondly, you forget the political probation you are on, with your adolescent nonsense and waverings. I have wanted for some time to find out where you stand, now that you've had a little experience of the mill. You yourself have forced the issue by sneaking into my office.'

'I didn't sneak in,' said Kit, pleased that his father had dropped the term spying. 'I told Miss Smellie I was going in——'

His father waved his demurs aside. 'We'll let that pass. It's much more important to know where you stand.'

Kit took his time, and that aided his new sense of self-esteem in his father's presence. 'Is it a crime I belong to a different generation? Isn't it better for me to fit into the new systems growing up?'

'Generalisations,' said his father with a gesture of scorn. 'Be precise about yourself and the mill, and the generalisations will take care of themselves.'

'I feel differently than I did before I entered the mill. And in many ways along lines you'd more or less approve. I am coming to feel the mill a part of myself, instead of something rather hostile and philistine.' He paused and saw that his father was controlling an impulse to interrupt. That again gave him a sense of power. 'But I've got to find my own terms of acceptance.'

'And what are those terms?' asked his father dryly.

'I still am not quite clear, but I'm getting closer.'

His father cleared his throat. 'I am ready to admit I don't myself see things in exactly the same light as I did, say, a year ago. I won't deny that Bevin has shown a proper sense of imperial responsibilities. Aye, a year ago I wouldn't have believed that Attlee and Cripps would stand so solidly against the fools and hotheads of their own party. Cripps's speech at Bradford against shorter work-hours was something of an eye-opener. I'm still for a Conservative majority and men like Woolton and Butler in charge; but now I'm ready to admit that there's a case for Labour. With large sections of the working-class in a dangerous state of insubordination, there's much to be said for having men like Bevin and Attlee in control. They're best placed for damping things down.' He raised his hand to stop Kit from speaking. 'That doesn't mean I myself choose this course. There's always a fear that

the hotheads will unseat the reliable men like Attlee. . . . All I am saying is that there's a case for the Labour Party; and if you'd taken the line I've sketched, I'd have disagreed but I wouldn't have fought you. There's plenty of good Labour councillors—Alderman Hogan, for example: I've been working with him on the housing committee, and I've found him a thoroughly reasonable man.'

'I shouldn't phrase it the same way,' said Kit, 'but what you've said does indicate points of agreement.'

His father flared up. 'I'm not entirely ignorant of the way you've been behaving. You've mixed with some very questionable characters. And I'd like to tell you I think it's highly disloyal to meet the worst agitators of the mill at a public-house, to discuss ways and means of obstructing me. When I heard that, I had some difficulty in holding myself back. If you hadn't fallen ill, you'd have heard about it.'

'I did nothing of the sort,' said Kit, reddening. 'I met some of the men to discuss how to raise the efficiency of the firm.'

'Indeed?' said his father sarcastically.

'How did you hear about it?' asked Kit. 'You didn't have your spy Bannister snooping under the table, did you?' Suddenly he realised that one of the men or women present must have been a stool-pigeon, who ran to the management with the whole story, probably in a distorted form, as soon as it was over. He felt a new pressure of fear and insecurity, and stammered, 'You know you're plotting against the government.' He tried to speak boldly. 'Is the mill involved in the black-market? I've got the right to know.'

His father regarded him with a malevolence in which a strange sort of triumph seemed mixed. 'Thank God, I never had a university education. What sort of a world do you think this is? I'm not going to try and explain things. You must grow up a lot first. I'll just say this. What you call plotting against the government is one aspect of aiding the forces in the government that make for order and decency. And what you call the black-market—if we ignore the petty back-street thing that usually goes under that name—it's now an integral part of our national life.' He gave a harsh, short laugh. 'We didn't choose that way out. It was forced on us by the systems of State-control. But if you infer from what I've said that Swintons is tangled up in a network of trifling illegal transactions, you're barking up the wrong tree. You're merely showing how far you still are from the real world.'

'I don't like that real world of yours very much,' said Kit, standing up and feeling at bay. 'A man understands what he wants to understand. I think I'd better get out of the whole thing.'

'Well, you know my proposition,' said his father, coldly measuring him up and down. 'Come right in and you'll know as much as I do

about the way things work. Or decide to get out, and I'll give you your fare to London, but not a farthing more.'

'But there must be some sense of honour——'

'Honour? Tell that to your trade-union friends, who'd wreck the nation for ha'penny a week on their wages. Tell it to your communist friends who don't give a damn for Britain as long as their masters in Moscow are pleased. But don't tell it to me, when it's the work of these friends of yours forcing me to take the steps necessary for saving the mill from disaster—and incidentally for saving these ungrateful fools who depend on it for their livelihood.'

'I still think two wrongs don't make a right,' said Kit, tensely standing there. 'The firm wasn't built up like that. What would grandfather say?'

'In his time the owner could act in a straightforward way. They could lock-out, evict, jail strikers. Now the hands have got too strong. He'd approve of what I do, if he'd grown up in our world.'

'I don't believe it.'

His father smiled grimly. 'Look at Dacres then. He's a pillar of the chapel, and he does things I wouldn't do in this black-market you're so interested in. But that's beside the point. You've heard what I said. I expect a definite answer by the end of the week. Don't blame me for bringing things to a head sooner than I meant. Blame the high-minded circles from which you learned your methods of disloyalty and espionage.'

Kit was shaken with rage and an aching self-pity, but the hubbub of his emotions left him incapable of further speech. He yearned to get away at all costs, and felt bewildered at the sudden transition from a scene in which he'd seemed to have the upper hand to this scene in which he stood cornered, dumb, broken with anger.

Margaret appeared at the door of her room, open-mouthed with wondering sympathy. 'Was he very bad-tempered?'

He felt, above all, a need not to let her see how the interview had shaken him. 'Not more than usual,' he said, in a voice sounding rough and distant. Margaret looked pretty with the light behind picking out the curls on either side of her head and her face in a soft shadow. She had her dressing-gown on, and her slender throat and chest were bare. She looked charmingly frail, haloed in straw-gold, and as he watched she folded her arms over her breasts. 'You've been making up.'

She raised her hands up to her shoulders and snuggled inside her arms. 'I practise sometimes with Joyce's things. Do I look a fright?' He caught her chin and turned her face round to the light. 'I smelt the powder.' He kissed her cheek. 'Now go back and do your homework.'

'I hate it. I'd rather do anything else. Anything.'

She seemed appealing for some sort of help, but he patted her and went on. The moment he was inside his room, his nerves gave way, and he paced up and down in an agony of caged fury. He'd have a breakdown if he stayed in. But what was he to do? Ask Margaret out again? No, he couldn't have on his conscience the thought that he'd started her off on a career of vice. Brian then? No, Brian would merely respond with plans for their emigration to Soho or the Hebrides.

He studied his face in the mirror as though looking for a wound, and thought of Rose. Why hadn't he asked her for her address when he met her the other day? Jill? At last he reluctantly forced his thoughts to Jill. No, he couldn't go to her now unless he had already resolved to throw in his lot with her, to defy his father. The interview had brought things to that definite point. Jill, Jill—he imagined himself embracing her unbelievably pliant yet strong body and at the same time striking madly at her stony resistance. Jane Dacres, then? He toyed with making her an ironic proposal of 'free love,' to which she would idealistically succumb but which he would continue to treat 'realistically.' But he couldn't bring himself to ring her up and begin the boring tragic-farce.

Colin? Yes, Colin, of course. He hadn't seen him since December; but he now felt that Colin, for all his narrow intensities, was the one person capable of appreciating the struggle that rent him.

At first he thought there was no light in the nasty little terrace-house in the frozen street. He bent and peeped through the large key-hole and saw a dim light at the passage-end. Then a door opened and a light-shaft fell through on to the frayed linoleum.

Colin held a little round-bottomed night-lamp. He blinked and peered to see who stood on the doorstep. 'Come in,' he stuttered. 'Is anything wrong?' He didn't ask how Kit had found the house.

'There's always something wrong. Surely you know that. No, I won't come in. Put your coat on and come out for a drink.'

Colin in his relieved hurry left him at the open door and went back into the lighted room. In a few moments he returned struggling into an overcoat and took a cap from the spiky little hallstand. 'Where are we going?' he asked as he closed the door and shivered in a gust of wind.

'Anywhere,' said Kit. Then, feeling the need for clear decisions, he picked himself up, 'I know. This way. I brought the car.'

In twenty minutes they stopped near the hotel to which he'd taken Margaret, and walked across to the portico of cast-iron and coloured glass and the swing-doors. Colin said he'd have a sherry and Kit

ordered whisky. He had chosen the same table as that at which he and Margaret had sat.

'Well, here we are,' he said, and Colin raised his thick eyebrows. 'I suppose if one talks about a problem, one soon confuses the issues and shifts the centre of gravity. Then everything seems simple again. But all one has done is make things worse for next time.'

'Yes,' said Colin. 'You probably didn't mean what you said, but it was profoundly true, all the same.'

Colin's slight squint seemed worse, as it usually did at moments of intellectual concentration, and he watched the warm, winking light in the sherry that he was moving round and round, as if seeking to hypnotise himself with the navel of fire. 'I was just finishing off *The Yogi and the Commissar* when you knocked. Koestler's not a deep thinker, he has too many impurities from his own Marxist past, but he says many deep things. He's right about the fundamental nature of yogi ethics as the sole source of guidance in ethical dilemmas, where the rule-of-thumb of social utility shows up in all its mechanical superficiality. And our world today is solely composed of such ethical dilemmas. The only hope is to escape the horizontal level where thought and action go on, by being constantly aware of the vertical dimension.'

'I'm afraid that doesn't help much.'

'You haven't tried it. Of course modern man finds the method of contemplation extremely difficult. He has become so materialistically immersed in the insoluble contradictions of actuality. Unless he is torn to pieces by meaningless frictions, he ceases to be alive. He exists in terms of thermodynamics, not the spirit. The laws of heat and friction, discovered as a result of the industrial machine, are in truth the laws of capitalist society—though communism takes them over and intensifies incomparably their dominance. The end of friction seems death to modern man, capitalist or communist. But the death he fears is the life of the universe.'

'I still don't see how to apply what you say.'

'To put it more journalistically,' said Colin, blinking, 'man's mechanical and scientific powers have outrun his moral basis.'

'What's the solution then? To scrap science, the machines and so on, till we bring the material basis down to the level of our moral being?' Kit laughed mockingly. 'Who's going to decide when equilibrium is reached and the machine-scraping can stop? Mother Famine and Father Massacre?'

'We've got to get the basic acceptances into our system before we can find out what the consequences are. Your questions show that you are still thinking within the old limits.' Colin closed his eyes and seemed

even more pallid. 'A kind of inner peace, a realisation of the absolute antinomies of life, a resolution of those antinomies in the dialectic of the self, the dialectic of the limit. With no more desire to impose your will on others, no more desire to impose your crude little self on life in the madness of procreation.'

'All that's only words to me.'

'I'd have said the same two years ago.'

'Well, where do I start from? Take my problem in what you'd call all its crude littleness or its little crudity. Do I accept my father's position and go into the mill, a hundred per cent behind him, fighting or using any trickery to keep the workers down? Or do I go over to the workers—'

'Join the communist party,' Colin filled in, nodding. 'That's the only logical conclusion.'

Kit frowned. 'Yes, I suppose it is.' Now it seemed that he had been resisting this proposition ever since he met Jill.

'You can't see any middle course?'

'I can see it all right. The question is whether I can take it. The middle course, I suppose, is represented by Attlee, Cripps, Morrison. To some extent I've, in fact, been following this course, but various events have swung me off it.' He found that he couldn't mention Jill, so he strove to define his conflict solely in terms of his father's attack. 'My father, for instance, is insisting that I define exactly where I stand.'

'I don't see anything unreasonable in that,' said Colin earnestly, sipping the sherry. 'Nor why it should swing you from the middle course. I myself believe in the middle course, in so far as one is obliged to accept the world of action. It isn't good or true in itself, but it means the least friction. In a sense the greater the external slavery, the greater the chances of spiritual liberty. Note that I say the chances, for external slavery does not itself breed the inner release. Everywhere today the masses are crying out for increased enslavement, and using the catchwords of Liberty in the process. Not that they're alone in this. The owners and rulers too want State controls to protect them from the masses. Thus fascism and communism are only different aspects of the same sense of insecurity, the same fear of inner freedom.'

Kit replied slowly, carefully, 'All that boils down into an advice to accept my father's demands, the demands of power—'

'In order to escape them. In the long run to turn the tables on them. If only enough individuals acted like that, we'd generate in time a true revolutionary movement, one of *satyagraha*, non-resistance.'

'You could use that argument to accept fascism.'

'Under certain circumstances, yes. To avoid a greater danger, such as the triumph of communism. Certainly.'

Kit shook his head. 'Your arguments are too abstract for me.'

'They're not abstract at all. They're immediate, organic—mystical if you understand the real meaning of the word, but not abstract, not metaphysical in the narrow sense.'

Kit made a last effort to argue. 'But there's something so bad in our world, so corrupt—'

'The world has always been like that and always will be. Properly understood, corruption is a necessary part of spiritual freedom, just as decomposition and composition are both needed by the material world. It's the mad communist effort to extirpate corruption that begets the worst fate of all, death in materialism.'

Kit had been so intent that he hadn't looked up when a party settled at a near table. But now he saw Colin looking up at someone behind him, and he felt a light hand on his shoulder. He turned and saw Joyce. 'Caught,' she said.

He stood up confusedly, and so did Colin. 'Colin Harker,' he muttered. 'My sister Joyce.'

She took Kit's arm. 'Somebody wants to meet you.' They moved over to the other table, where her friends were settling noisily down. A quite young girl with a fringe, another girl somewhat older, a young fellow with pale flat brushed-back hair and protruding eyes, and an older man with a jesting manner and hard small eyes set deeply under straight brows. 'We're going on to Valerie's in a moment,' said Joyce, squeezing Kit's arm.

'So you're Joyce's son, eh, laddie?' asked the jester.

'Grandson,' said Joyce, who didn't, however, look pleased.

'I always get things wrong,' said the jester, smutting his brow. 'On my marriage night I went to bed with my wife's sister, with the result that she divorced her own hubbie for conjugal inadequacy. But that was in the great days before the war when beer was beer and women were sluts, and the food didn't rot your guts, hallelujah.'

'Shut up,' said Joyce, 'animal.'

'I apologise. The beer may be water or worse, and the food may be muck, but the women are still sluts, bless their little hearts or whatever you call it. Don't you agree, Einstein?' he asked Colin bellicosely.

Colin stuttered, trying to think of a quotation from *Prufrock*, but Joyce came to his rescue. 'Don't bother to answer him back. Sometimes we spit in his eye, that's all.'

The young girl, apparently named Twit, was overtaken with a fit of titters. 'Our names rhyme,' she said to Kit. 'Kit and Twit, twittery Kit and kittery Twit, Kit for cat and Twit for twat. Isn't it ridiculous? You could go on for hours with twittery rwattery kutcats. And when you hear my real name, you'll die of laughing.' She had pale blue eyes,

ke water, and yellowish hair cut in a fringe level with her brows, a small nose and a strong rounded chin.

Kit took one arm of the girl whose party name rhymed with his, and found that the tall fellow mutely and ferociously grasped the other. 'Aren't I popular?' said Twit. 'Today elegance and contraceptives like the place of morality. Isn't that so, Paul? Isn't that so, Kitcat?' Sheurst into titters and had to be carried by the two men. 'Let's all be happy, after all. Oh, I do think it's so ridiculous, isn't it, Squittery-quattery squit-squat.'

They emerged into the street, and now Kit loved the bitter chill, the death-shroud of white that transformed the darkness. It's good, he thought, good, this frost that throws its glittering spanner in all the sad mechanisms. A murmur of silence in which the scrofulous soul is forced to look in upon itself. Death's other kingdom. Looking back across the river.

Joyce dragged Colin into the car with her, and Kit was left to walk with the tall young man, Paul, who gave directions in fierce monosyllables. Luckily, Valerie's flat wasn't far off. 'Come up quietly,' said the other girl, whom Kit now found was named Chloe. But of course Twit knocked a milk-bottle down the stairs and was so convulsed with laughter that once more Kit and Paul had to carry her between them. She clung to Kit. 'We rhyme, don't we? And rhymes are a substitute for morality, as long as lovey-dovey.' She kicked her shoe off down two flights and Paul had to go down after it. She pouted after him with her stockinged foot. 'He's obsolete, he's obscene, he's jealous. So I make him jealous. Fitfat Kitcat Pitpat, what a lovely name you've got. It's a substitute for morality. So let's make Paul jealous, h.'

Valerie, with her finger on her lip, ushered them in. The jester produced a bottle of whisky, and she kissed him. Then the bell rang and he let the maddened Paul in. Twit lifted her foot for the shoe and fell on her back. So she kicked the other shoe off, and remarked, 'It's nice to be a girl sometimes.' Valerie squirted soda-water on her and she sat up.

'Control your harem, Paul.' She took Kit's arm. 'How nice to see your sober face. I want a long, lone silence with you.'

The jester, Alf, poured out a round of whisky. 'A serious moment,' he shouted, 'and a serious toast. Death to Shinwell!'

'Death to Shinwell!' the others repeated, and Alf went through the notions of hanging someone.

'I've got the utterest record,' said Valerie with a scream. 'It'll make you split your bellybands with laughter.' She wound the gramophone up and put the record on. 'Alf and I bought it for threepence in a

street-market,' The record was of a Victorian ballad about meetings in heaven, sung sincerely in a Cockney accent, and sent everyone into screams and bellows of merriment, except Colin, quiet on the sofa in an alcove at the back, and Kit by the window watching the faces.

'Oh, Val, it's priceless,' said a thin long-jawed girl who'd been in the flat when the others arrived. 'Too gorgeous for words.'

Twit, who had been looking inside the piano, came swaying over to Kit. 'Tell you a secret,' she breathed hotly over him. 'My name. It's Angelina Victoria Ffoulkes-Throgmorton. What could a poor girl do with a handicap like that? No wonder I've found a substitute for morality. It's making Paul jealous. My father's a clergyman, retired through diabetes.' She tittered. 'Let's make Paul jealous, Tit-for-tat, Tittery-Tattery.'

Valerie removed her. 'Here, Paul, keep your junk to yourself, or I'll call the dustman in.'

'She's being rude,' sobbed Twit, falling into his arms. 'Let's make her jealous, Paul.'

Chloe and Alf danced, and Sue put a red cushion in the middle of the floor and stood on her head. Joyce was sitting by Colin, putting her cigarette ash in his coat pocket. Valerie asked Kit to help her bring some beer in. In the kitchen she enveloped him in a large kiss. 'Don't go with the others . . . There's something I want to talk over with you. . . Now, now, behave yourself . . . Up with those bottles.'

Back in the room, he listened to snatches of Colin's conversation in the alcove with Indian hangings, embroidery inset with hundreds of little glass eyes. 'It's rather heretical to inculcate sin so that one may repent. . . Do you know Reich's theory of the orgasm? I believe it can be harmonised with Yogi practices.'

'Sounds like a new vice to me,' said Joyce with her throaty laugh. 'But I'll try anything once.' She leaned closer and whispered.

Wonderful how things happen, thought Kit. Here I've been virtuous for hell-knows-how-long, and all at once I'm having hordes of wenches flung at my head.

Paul was taking Twit to be sick in the bathroom.

Colin was saying, 'The communists ignore *angst*, ignore the meta-physical anguish that lies at the root of every moment of our experience. How can one find a common idiom with such barbarians? . . . No, I feel something deep, suffering, sisterly and terrible in your eyes.' His face was drawn and his brow clammy with sweat as though the whispered words were pincered out of him.

He awoke slowly, coming up through a misty nightmare that long refused to leave his brain and let him realise where he was. Then he

knew. And his body felt astonishingly aerial, strange and weightless, floating in a green-grey cobweb of morning light. Slowly he lifted his head and looked at Valerie. She lay on her back, her head twisted sideways off the pillow, mouth open, breathing a little stertorously. The skin of her face was greenish, slightly blotched, but her shoulders and the one arm that lay outside the bedclothes were plumply white.

He wanted to get away at all costs, dreading the moment of her waking, when he'd have to establish some sort of relationship with her—begin lying . . . She stirred and opened her eyes. They stared at one another. Somehow, for the first time, she seemed human, not at all the woman previously known as Valerie. An ordinary person, with ordinary worries and hopes. Almost as if she were his wife and they'd known each other for years. She gave in first, reaching up and pulling his face down over hers.

They lay together for a while, then she muttered something, slipped naked from bed and went out. He lay inert, still feeling strange and light, but with a dim gnawing nausea that seemed outside him, a danger attacking from without, not a property of his strange light body floating in its own ethereal space.

She slipped back and turned to him. But he sat up, violently affected by the nausea. He got out and stood staggering with a pulse of pain in his head, then made for the bathroom and arrived just in time. Even worse than the sickness was the sensation of shame. If only he had been dressed, he'd have sneaked out of the flat, happy never to see Valerie or Joyce or any of their wretched crowd again.

When he returned to Valerie, feeling better but with a racking headache, he found Twit, alias Angelina Victoria, sitting on the bed with crossed knees in a pair of silk pyjamas too large for her. She looked big-eyed and subdued, and had slept on the sofa. 'I do feel awful. It isn't worth it. How did I behave last night? It's awful not remembering. I passed out, didn't I? Did Paul look after me? I'm sure he did. He's such a darling. It must have been gin. Beer or whisky or wine don't affect me.'

'You had rum, not gin, last night,' said Valerie.

'Oh, that's going too far to say that,' said Twit, as if her last hope had now gone. She appealed to Kit, 'Didn't you see me drinking gin?' She turned to Valerie again. 'Did Paul watch me all the time? I do hope he did. It's awful not remembering things.'

'Nobody ravished you, now go and make some coffee.'

'Then Paul can't be very very angry,' she said brightening, and turned to go. The pyjama trousers slipped off, and stooping, she tripped and fell on her face. Kit helped her up and she clung to him, weeping.

'Do you think I'm too too dreadful? But imagine what it's like having a rural dean for your father, and a mother whose only interest in life is colon-irrigation and herbaceous borders.'

He patted her and she went off. Valerie told him that Joyce had rung Mrs Throgmorton and told her that Angelina would be staying the night with her. 'She's ever so good with stray boozers and lechers. She goes to no end of trouble to help them.' She leaned and kissed him. 'Don't look so serious.'

He left after lunch and went home, where he sat in his room reading a detective story. All the while a painful tumult heaved and pressed hotly at the back of his mind, but he refused to pause and let it break through into consciousness. At intervals he paced the room. The need for a full release from his uncertainty grew on him, till at last he could bear it no longer. He went out and drove to the mill. Miss Smellie gave him a secretarial look, but without pausing he passed through into the inner office.

He hadn't knocked, and the two men glanced up with surprise. Bannister was sitting on the arm of a chair and chatting with Swinton. 'Can I have a few words with you, father?' Kit asked. 'Alone.' He looked superciliously at Bannister.

Swinton nodded and Bannister with a wave of his hand went out. Swinton stared at Kit, who sat in the chair Bannister had left. 'Well,' he asked, taking up a letter and putting it down again.

'I've been thinking . . . and as I've come to definite conclusions I don't want to waste any more time. I agree, I entirely agree, that my primary loyalty is to the mill.' He spoke on hastily as his father seemed about to interrupt. 'But that doesn't mean I approach the matter, or ever will, along the same lines as you do.'

'So far so good,' said Swinton stuffily. 'How do the divergences work out?'

'I'm going to join the Labour Party. Seriously this time. When I called myself a socialist before, I was making an incoherent gesture. But now I feel I'm on solid ground. I want you to introduce me to this friend Hogan of yours, and any others like him. From any viewpoint I think a man like Morrison a better friend for a mill-owner of medium size than all your Wooltons and Churchills, who are really only interested in big business.'

His father answered slowly, 'I've already told you that I don't hold those views myself, but I'm ready to allow them as reasonable.'

'There's only one other point; and if you agree to this, I'm with you. There must be a Joint Production Committee.'

His father frowned irritably. 'It's no use. It only causes trouble and

encourages the workers to think they can run things. The most irresponsible shop-stewards get on to it.'

'There's no course without risks and problems, but I've seen enough of the mill from the shed level to know that J.P.C.s can be made very useful if the management know how to handle them.'

Swinton meditated, then smiled and smoothed out the letter before him. 'All right. Perhaps your idea isn't so bad when it's linked with other developments we have in hand.' He pulled out one of the left-hand drawers and took up a paper. 'Many familiar faces won't be seen in the mill when we resume work. Bannister and I have been deciding on certain rationalisations. . . . They involve some curtailments of staff. The hands who won't be taken on again are the trouble-makers.'

'Can I see the list?'

Swinton hesitated a moment, gave Kit a quick look, and handed the paper over. 'You can't say that I don't trust you . . .'

Kit glanced down the list. Dan . . . Old Bessy . . . Jill . . . Sam . . . all the militants were there. His pulse leaped and then he reached calm, handing the paper back. 'But do you think you can get away with it?'

'Normally, no. There'd be an outcry about redundancy and discrimination and the rest of it, and probably a strike. But after the frost and the spell of unemployment the workers will accept almost anything. You'll see.'

Kit felt a wave of nausea. He gripped the arms of the chair, and stared at the floor, at his father's shoes under the desk. What was he doing? Was he betraying Dan and Jill? Or was he realistically facing the needs of the situation? He knew that he didn't want Jill any longer in the works; but a vague feeling of shame and discomfort was something different from direct acceptance of his father's plans for dismissals. He wanted to ask for Jill to be excepted . . . and yet he couldn't; he knew that this was the crucial moment in his life. If he failed to achieve accord now with his father he might as well go straight off to London with Brian. He recalled that someone at *The Green Man* meeting had been a spy, and with a supreme effort he mastered his qualms. 'The thing may not be as easy as you hope, but I agree you've a good chance of getting away with it.'

His father smiled. 'I think we'll get along all right now, and I'm very happy indeed that everything's worked out as it has. I felt sure that if you were even a short while in the mill, you'd begin to feel the Swinton way about it. It's in our blood, after all, the mill and its looms. . . .' He rose and went to the cupboard in the corner. 'I feel this is a moment that calls for a little ceremony.' He poured some whisky from a bottle into two little glasses, and handed one of the glasses to Kit. 'To the Mill!'

'I wouldn't like to say without going into the details,' said Emery. 'But it could be.' He felt cheerful at showing a better grasp of things than Partridge, and threw in another point. 'You can't forget the problem of sub-contracts and the jackal-firms. . . .' He spoke cheerfully, drawing Partridge on, so that his superiority wouldn't rankle. 'You know that, of course.'

Harkness listened intently and contributed a few details. 'What put the wind up lots of the boys was the way the sack was operated. They were told to hand in everything. Every bloody thing. Tools that'd been out for years, gadgets that'd been lost when Queen Victoria was still a maiden. You never saw such a farce. All sorts of useless old junk was handed in and solemnly ticked off. It really was like the Last Day.'

'I wonder was that thought-up, or was it just fools carrying instructions out literally?' asked Partridge.

'It worked,' said Emery.

'Aye, it worked,' said Harkness. He grinned. 'And here's another thing that makes you laugh. As you know, we're starting on night-work, because of power. There's a lot of chaps who've always refused to do night-work and had some tale or other. But you can guess they don't like to say no just now. All the same, they crab like hell. I went in last night and found 'em grousing away, so I stood on a bench and gave 'em a taste of my tongue. I'm not back myself yet, you know.'

'Good on you,' said Emery.

Altogether he felt in a pleasant mood after Harkness had gone. He said, 'Right,' when Clayton phoned him about four o'clock and fixed an appointment at six in the pub nearby. 'I've got something important to tell you, old chap.' Emery wasn't very interested; he'd grown tired of fencing with Clayton and was determined not to get mixed up in any of his schemes. And so he merely nodded with a half-smile when Clayton hurried into the bar. 'You know the Under-Secretary who's coming up,' said Clayton. 'He's a good chap, I believe. Well, you'll meet him, no doubt, after he's made his little speech. But what I want to talk about is something a bit more special. What about coming along to a dinner we're giving?'

'What, the Chamber of Commerce dinner!'

'No, not that. Sir William is giving a rather more private affair, a rather more select one. He asked me to suggest a couple of you trade-union chaps—'

'Bribery and corruption,' said Emery with a grin, 'eh?'

'Bribe and corrupt a T.U. official by asking him to dine with an Under-Secretary of the Labour Government?' chuckled Clayton. 'It's you that said it, not me, old boy.'

'Well, why pick on me?'

'You know why. I happen to respect you, and that's more than can say of all your colleagues. They're either red demagogues or Uriah Heeps. No, believe it or not, Will, I respect you. And I know Sir William does.'

'That's the kind of lie that gets my back up,' said Emery, flushing.

'All the same, you'll come?'

'I don't know. . . .'

'Bring your missus . . . if she enjoys that sort of party.'

Emery knew that he meant. If she's presentable. Again he felt hostile to Clayton, but he answered, 'I don't know. When do I have to give an answer by?' He had made up his mind to go, but he wasn't ready to tell Clayton. Let Clayton realise he wouldn't grovel for the sort of invitation. I'll go, he thought, but I'll have to watch my step one slip and these sharks will have me. If I baffle 'em, I can use the prestige I gain for my own purposes, whether they like it or not.

'Day after tomorrow,' said Clayton.

★

As Jean turned into the street, she came on to Mrs Hockett and Mr Elk, heavily shawled and talking loudly, slightly bowed under the col but unable to break the thread of their excited discourse. 'Eec, so here you are home again,' said Mrs Elk, with small dark eyes bright under broad brows. 'Eec, and as I was just telling Nelly, there's been some pretty goings-on at Colton's. Look at Jim Stubbins, he's a bachelor but he's gone back while there's family-men still left out in the cold. She nodded furiously. 'Favouritism, that's what I call it, and I don't care who hears me.' She lowered her voice and looked round suspiciously. 'Arse-crawling. You can't say otherwise.'

'No, I don't hold with that,' said Mrs Hockett, brushing a bluish blob of water from her nose-tip with the back of her hand. 'I say a good man is first picked. A good steady worker like my Bill. I know I've said some hard things, but I've come round to thinking that the ones who did the most blethering were those who had good reason to feel scared. . . .'

Jean tried to control her anger. 'There's only one way to make sure of the jobs, you know it as well as I do—and it doesn't mean that sort of cut-throat talk. It means sucking together.'

Mrs Hockett pursed her lips and Mrs Elk snuffed, and Jean walked on over the slippery cobbles. As she quickened her pace in impatience Harry darted out from a dark narrow side-lane. 'Can I have a word with you, Mrs Emery?' he asked, panting a little from stress of emotion rather than haste.

'Of course you can, as long as you don't call me missus.'

He went along at her side, crouching slightly, with his cap pulled over his face. 'I dunno where I am nowadays. Miss Smithers, that I've never said a word to in all my born years, came along and tried to get me the sack. She said I only escaped going to jail as a thief because there wasn't any evidence.'

'She's the one who'll go to jail if she talks like that,' said Jean indignantly. 'Tell her you'll sue her for libel.'

'I don't want nowt to do with the law, please,' he besought. 'I'd rather lose my job, please.'

'You're letting it all get you down, Harry,' said Jean. 'For Annie's sake you mustn't.'

As usual, that appeal stiffened him and the whine left his voice. 'That's why I wanted to see you, Mrs—Jean, I mean. I've found out where she is.' He spoke almost in a whisper, but with a note of pride. 'Don't tell anyone, I passed a ten-bob note to one of the coppers I know a bit... and he found out for me. Where do you think they've put her?'

'Where?' asked Jean impatiently. They halted, outside the faint radius of light from the lamp-post. Children were playing some tiggam, coming within the little tent of dim light, then darting out into the envolving gloom with shrill cries and sudden silences.

'You know the magistrate that tried her, Mr Tindal. He's a director of Swayle and Co., and they've put poor Annie working in the canteen kitchen.' His voice choked.

'Are you sure?'

'That's what he told me.'

They were nearing Jean's house. 'Thanks, Harry,' she said gently. 'That was very clever of you. I'll make the solicitor start off some formal inquiries, and we'll see if we can't make things hot for Mr Tindal. Now, whatever you do, don't lose heart.'

'No, Jean,' said Harry in something like his former blithe voice. 'God bless you. I don't know what I'd do without you.'

She pressed his hand, said good night, and went on past the lamp-post. For once she felt wrapped up in her own affairs, unable to give anything like full interest to the problems of other people. Harry stood watching her a moment, and then faded away into the night. She turned the key and went in.

She had come home in a chastened mood, determined to have things out, but also to be sympathetic. And she did her best to put Harry and Annie out of her thoughts, and to concentrate on the coming talk. It was only fair to Will. She thought: I won't be put off by the misunderstandings and abuse that are sure to come up as soon as we clash; I'll hang on till we get through all that dirt to the living thing underneath. She had argued herself round till she was quite sure that the love

and the liking which had drawn her and Emery together were still pulsing at the core of their lives, overlaid by habitual discordancies and wilful bitterness. Both of them had failed to break down their obstinate reserve and speak out with simple and trustful honesty. She blamed herself most for having become physically withdrawn; and as she waited in the house for Will's return, she imagined with an intense yearning their reconciliation, their frank sharing of troubles and problems, their rediscovery of a passionate relation. She trembled uncontrollably at what she thought was a knock, and held her breasts in her hands, murmuring: 'Poor Will, there hasn't been any milk in me to feed him with tenderness. I've withered him up spiritually. . . .'

When he did come in, she sat unmoving. 'Hallo, Jean,' he said. 'So you're back.'

There was something false in his friendly tone, but she forced herself to ask amiably, 'You got my card?' And she turned up her face. He kissed her, with the merest of duty-kisses, and she felt somehow humiliated. He went to wash his hands, and she said more abruptly than she'd meant, 'I think we'd better have a talk, Will.' But he had turned the tap on and couldn't hear her.

'What was that?' he said, returning with towel in hand.

'I said we really must have a talk. Sit down.'

'What, before dinner?' he asked jestingly.

She nodded. She'd intended to start the discussion only after they'd eaten. The pie must almost be done in the oven, and yet she couldn't resist starting an argument as soon as he arrived. Without a word, he sat down opposite. She would have liked to take his hand, but he was too far away. 'We've been drifting apart, Will, and it's got to stop. No, don't say anything yet. I'm not blaming you—or not any more than I blame myself. I believed in married couples keeping nothing hidden—all the cards on the table—but somehow I don't seem to act up to my convictions.'

'Well, what have you got hidden?' he asked with a sarcasm that might have been either cold or chaffing.

'It isn't a question of any specific thing. It's a matter of daily wrapping ourselves up more and more in ideas and feelings, likes and dislikes, that gradually draw us apart, and then one morning we wake up and think: 'Who's this person in my bed? We're strangers.'

'I haven't complained—'

'You've complained all the while, and quite rightly.'

'Well, what are you suggesting?'

'Just that we stop it.' She tried to keep the note of asperity out of her voice, but he wasn't being very helpful.

'All right, let's stop it.'

'You make it sound stupid and made-up.'

'I don't know. I can't figure out what you're getting at. Is there something on your mind you're afraid to tell me?' His voice hardened. 'Something that's been happening this last fortnight, while you were with that cousin of yours. . . .'

She again quelled her rising anger. 'I'm talking about a way of life, Will, not sins and repentances and all that old junk. I'm saying that there's something wrong in our way of life. We've got all closed-in and smug and respectable.'

'I don't feel particularly closed-in. If you had any idea of the way my work bangs me all over the place—'

'One can be lost and alone in a crowd, and happy and surrounded by friends in a desert. It's the way of life—'

'I didn't know you'd been going to church,' he mocked her. 'Way of life. Way of life. What's wrong with us? We live in a bad world, and we do what we can to mend things—'

'We live in a bad world and we try to make it worse,' she retorted sharply. 'Mend things! To think you were once a man who wanted to smash the whole dirty set-up—'

'Once!' he said angrily. 'I haven't changed an iota of my beliefs. But you can't be such a fool as to want the same tactics under a Labour Government as under a Tory. What about the way Lenin rebuked Gallacher and the rest for infantile tactics and called for a united front of the working-class and its allies?'

She shrank and stood up. 'Don't you dare to take the name of Lenin in that foul mouth of yours? Don't you dare!'

He stared at her in surprise. 'What's wrong?' He too stood up and reached out, suddenly frightened.

'Don't you dare touch me.' She backed towards the wall. 'Yes, we've got to nave this out if it kills us. What the hell do you think you're doing in that office of yours? You've only got one idea, and that's how to stick to a cushy job. You're dead scared of having to go back to the bench. You'd lie, sell yourself, do anything to escape it—'

'You're mad, Jean, you're mad.'

'Haven't I seen you turning on the men who elected you? You've come almost to hate 'em because you feel they're pulling you down again.'

With something like dignity, he remarked, 'You've been thinking that and you never said a word before.'

She hesitated and stammered for a moment. 'It's a lie that I haven't said a word. I've said plenty. It's true I haven't put it as bluntly as this before, but that's because I've been trying to evade the truth myself. It's only because you're forcing me now to look at things just as they are—'

'I'm not forcing you to anything.' He broke off and sat down again.

'Very well, let's have this showdown of yours. I've been as long dissatisfied with you as you with me. Have you helped me the least bit these last two or three years? You've just resented my success, and this last year you've made it obvious. I'm not trying to say I'm perfect. In a job like mine, a man's walking a tight-rope all the time, and he's got to be quick on his feet if he isn't going to fall one side or the other. Maybe I have fallen now and then—Oh, don't misunderstand me. I only mean I've made mistakes I needn't have made if you'd been a proper wife. I've tried lots of times to discuss things as they come up, and all you've done is look at me as if I was the dog's vomit. The workers are always right. That's been your one idea—'

'And they always are right every time they fight back against this bloody system you want to mend up!'

'Theoretically, yes. As if I didn't know that. But when there's a Labour Government doing its best, there's got to be lots of compromise and give-and-take in the first stages. No, don't start shouting again. I'm talking and I'm going to talk. I've begun to get the knack of this job of mine. I've begun to find out how to get all that's possible from the managements and give away the least. They don't like me, but they respect me. I haven't told you, but they've tried again and again to corrupt me—from a bottle of whisky in race week to hints about the Stock Exchange. And I haven't given 'em an inch. That's why they respect me as they don't respect a chap like Oliver, who's honest enough but who can't resist whisky.' Again he silenced her with a gesture. 'And I'll go on fighting 'em on their own ground, and winning. Only today I got an invitation to a dinner with the Under-Secretary. . . . ' He lowered his eyes and tried to speak confidently. 'What's more, you were included. Jean, can't you come in at my side and help me fight all these bastards?' For the first time his voice grew muzzy in a confused note of appeal and uncertainty.

'Who's giving the dinner?'

'Sir William Burnton.'

He tried to speak masterfully, staring her down. She watched him with blazing eyes. At last she spoke. 'Will Emery, I came home today with all the love in the world, telling myself off for having let you down. But I can see now it wouldn't have mattered what I'd done. You're corrupt. You're corrupt through and through. My God, why didn't I see it clear before?' She clenched her fists and beat her breast.

'You're getting hysterical,' he said coldly.

She stared at him wildly. 'When did you change like that? Don't tell me the Will I used to love was rotten even in those days. No, I won't believe it. But how did you change like this? And how could I go on living with you day after day and not see it?'

'Shut up!' he cried. 'You're hysterical. You're run-down. You'd better go for a proper holiday or something. Or perhaps you'd better see a psychiatrist. You've never stopped comparing me with that father of yours. Anyone can go on bleating in an idealistic sort of way if he isn't given the hard job of changing the world along the only possible lines. Of course it's fine to have a one-track mind and denounce everyone who gets down into the mud of reality.' Suddenly phrases he had long meditated against Jean were flooding to his lips. 'I told you that about the dinner as a test. To see if you were a true wife or not. To see if you were ready to fight beside me and help me keep my footing in the damned undertow that's tugging all the while at a man like me. But no, all you want is your little sectarian self-righteousness.'

'Do you think Gavin died to keep you in an easy job?' she said slowly. 'Do you think . . .' She put her hands over her eyes. 'It's the end. May my soul rot in hell if I spend another night under your filthy roof.' She turned and went out.

He watched her go with a sense of triumph and a recoil of fear and doubt. If she went, how many things would be solved? How many new problems would be set up? He sat unmoving, as if the least stir would disturb the precarious balance of forces. He was not aware of any deliberate intention of driving Jean out, he felt that he'd done his best to be reasonable; and she'd shown that she had no desire to meet him on any common ground. She'd merely wanted to get admissions for use against him. Could she have found someone else?

He stood up in sudden rage, then stayed rigid, and slowly and noiselessly sank back in his chair. When he'd entered the kitchen, Barbara had been in the forefront of his thoughts, but as soon as the argument began, she had vanished. He tried to reconsider the situation in the light of his relations with her. If Jean went, would she expect to become Mrs Emery, after a divorce had been arranged? Or would she be satisfied to stay as his mistress in the discreet shadow? How would a separation (and even more so, a divorce) affect his official position? Certainly it upset his plans for a house at which he could entertain and all that. Perhaps he had better try to find a flat. In a Byker street everyone noticed who came and went; and after all, Barbara wasn't the only woman he might want to invite. . . . No, whatever happened, visit her in her own place, don't bring her home. He went on arguing these matters out with himself, afraid of Jean's going, afraid of her return into the kitchen, and yet listening for her departure. A fervent sense of new possibilities in life, new exciting chances, kept opening up before him.

The front door banged, and he started. Had she gone? With a

rending sense of loss and fear he rose, tiptoed to the door, opened it and said in a strained voice, 'Jean . . . are you there? Jean. . . .' He raised his voice, but still got no answer. Something broke inside him and he raced furiously and clumsily up the stairs, into the bedroom. No Jean. Drawers pulled out, clothes thrown about. Jean. Jean. . . .

He hurried downstairs again and went to the front door, opened it and looked out. Went back to the kitchen and sat down. Then he sprang up and ran back to the front door, opened and went into the street. The cold night dashed on his heated face, and the lights sparkled, blurred, swayed. 'Jean!' he called, turned left and turned right, and went back up the steps. She'll return, he thought, and I can't do any good by chasing her. She'll return or she won't. And he began thinking of buildings where he might find a convenient flat, Barbara, Sir William's dinner . . . and then stood up, shaken, at a sudden street noise. Jean. No, it's as well she's gone.

He wanted to go out and drink, but he couldn't bear to leave the house. She might come back. If she found him gone . . . Well, that's ended. Clearly it couldn't have gone on. Benson's trying to make trouble about that wretched meeting at Crow's, he thought, but luckily everyone's preoccupied about getting jobs back. I'll ask Clayton if he knows a flat. I mustn't lose my nerve.

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London

AFTER SOME uncertainties she called at the hospital, but found that Jeff had been sent home. He can't be so bad then, she thought, and sent him a card. He at once replied asking her to call, 'I'm going to be laid up for centuries.' So she went after work that afternoon, and with some difficulty found 341 in a line of small houses without numbers or names. The door was opened by a neat little woman whose grey hair was combed straight back and tied in a bun. 'Is this where Mr Jeff Burrows lives?' Phyl asked, and the woman smiled and said, 'Yes, are you Phyl Tremaine? Jeff's playing a game of patience, but he'll be ever so pleased to see you.'

Phyl went in and took off her coat and head-kerchief, and Mrs Burrows called out, 'Here's your friend, Jeff,' and Jeff shouted something back, and Mrs Burrows smiled. 'You'd better hurry up, or he'll start trying to come downstairs. He does hate being tied down in bed.'

So Phyl went up to the front bedroom, and found Jeff in bed

bandaged and trussed up, with cards spread on the bedcover. He held out his free hand and winced. 'You mustn't move,' she said.

'Say that again, and I'll jump out of bed,' he replied, grinning. His face wrinkled when he smiled. 'Take a seat and tell me how everyone is. Any more strikes since I left? And how's Matt? He's a fine chap. And Maudie? What colour are her toe-nails now. Remember, she didn't know whether to make 'em scarlet, or what was it?'

'A sort of purple. She's kept 'em scarlet.'

'Well, it's nice to see your face again. The doc says it'll be about three months before I'm myself again. March, April, May. Think of it. Well, they may keep me off the docks, but they won't keep me out of the water.' He tried to reach her with his free hand, but she was too much at the side, so she took his hand to save him the effort. The room was small but clean, with a fumed-oak wardrobe, a dressing-table and mirror, and a chest-of-drawers, as well as the large cast-iron bedstead with a photogravure of the Light of the World at its head and a very weak water-colour of sunset on the Pyramids over the chest-of-drawers. There was just room to move round the bed. Jeff caught her glance and went on, 'This isn't my room. They insisted on putting me into it, and I wasn't in a position to argue. Well, what have you been doing with yourself?'

She hadn't anything to tell at all, and so she felt shy, out of place. Why had she come? Not that Jeff seemed to bother about her silence. He went on talking, turning her hand over and over, and letting go only to roll a cigarette. 'Didn't I tell you it came in handy sometimes?' Then he fondled her hand again, and she felt ashamed. Her hand was reddened and roughened with work in the frost, with a cut on the forefinger and the nails not so clean after one hurried wash in the restaurant sink. A rather broad hand with the nail of the little finger bitten down and one of the knuckles swollen. But he didn't seem to mind, he opened and shut the fingers, and then lifted the palm to his mouth.

'I only came for a moment,' she said, rising. 'Mum will be thinking I'm run over.'

'Come back, sugar-spoon.'

She kept smiling to herself all the way home, and then trying to look serious, for fear people would think she was going out of her head. Nobody could deny that Jeff had something about him. Even when held down by his injury to the bed, he seemed more full of life than most of the people she knew. At home Tremaine was daily gloomier; and now she found him repeating his tale of the miseries of the Labour Exchange, while Mrs Tremaine darned Herb's socks and sighed. 'He says: Powers of regional officers are limited, employers have the men, allocation of labour by the Ministry don't work. . . .

Well, what's he paid for? He don't mind how many unemployed there are. He won't lose his job. Not he, the more unemployed there are the happier he feels. Lew was there. Like old times, he says. They got us where they want us, he says. And all the while the posters grinning at you. Coal-mining is a National Service, You are Chosen to be a Miner. If I've read those words once, I've read 'em a thousand times. Pointing at me, mund you. Ah, it's a dirty world. They've got everything planned out. You're suspended on Monday, wait till Thursday before you're eligible. Oh yes, but the Exchange-week ends on Wednesday. So you can't be included in the payments issued on Friday. Very sorry, can't be done. Next please.' He scowled at Phyl. 'All our troubles began the day I was made a cat's-paw and got in the bad books of the law.' He appealed to his wife.

'She meant it for the best,' said Mrs Tremaine, only half listening. 'Oh dear, I've dropped three stitches. In a way I dread the good weather. It'll mean Herb misbehaving again.' She looked up at Phyl. 'Where is he now, by the way? Do you know?'

Phyl shook her head. She didn't like to tell her mother what she knew of Herb and last Saturday. A mechanic had let several boys into a garage workshop as the afternoon was wet as well as cold; and while he was out they'd smashed all the bottles, shying bolts at them; and then to warm the place they'd built a fire with old sacks and bits of wood in the middle of the floor. When the mechanic came back, they ran. The police were after them, and Mary Wilks had told Phyl that both her brother Tim and Herb had been among the wreckers.

At the restaurant Maudie had some new troubles. For once she was being pursued. 'Honest, I didn't mean to marry him. He's as rough as bags, and he's too small. He only reaches my tummy-hole. I was ashamed to go down the street with him. But Sam Marryat had let me down and I took pity on him, and now he won't let me alone.'

'Does he want to marry you?' asked Phyl.

'That's what he says,' replied Maudie, as if marriage was only a pretext for something much darker. 'And to make it worse, his name's Aloysius.'

Luckily he couldn't get along during work hours, but he generally managed to turn up a few minutes after closing time. He banged on the door till Spuds went and scared him. Then he lurked round, and Maudie had to go out the back way, which made her waste more than five minutes in getting to the bus-stop. 'Where's Maudie?' he asked Phyl, who told him what Maudie had told her to say—that she had bad toothache. 'Where's she live?' asked Aloysius, and produced a ten-bob note. 'It's all yours if you tell me.' Phyl said she didn't know.

But Aloysius still hung on; he wanted to talk about Maudie. A small squat man, not quite such a gnome as Maudie made out, but he was rather odd-looking, with big flapping ears, a squint, and a torn nostril. 'Aw, indeed, she's a lovely girl,' he repeated. 'I'd kill anyone that tried to take her from me.'

Mrs Mulready called Phyl up the next day to help her with the bead-mosaic. They laid the panel flat, poured linseed oil over it, then dusted with a finely powdered whiteness. The resulting paste was brushed well into the mosaic, and finally the bead-face was wiped with a soft cloth. Phyl did most of the work at Mrs Mulready's orders, and as Pearl had been interested in Mrs Mulready, she told Mrs Mulready about Pearl. 'Pearlie was going with two boys, and she doesn't really know which it was,' she said. 'That's why she gets so furious when her mother asks questions. I don't know how a girl could act like that, do you?'

Mrs Mulready sighed. 'You're too innocent, Phyl, but I like it. Don't let anyone spoil you.' And she gave her a pair of nylons that her husband had bought from a sailor. 'Put them on now. They'll look lovely on you.'

At last Phyl wrote a postcard to Bette and got another back by return, asking her to come along on Sunday evening and stay for the night. She tried to time the journey to the mews, but arrived half an hour early. However, Harry welcomed her with a hug and told her she could peel some potatoes. Bette was out, at a meeting.

She sat with the potatoes and a dish, while Harry fussed around, preparing the meal. He asked her lots of questions about the docks, and she found that she didn't know as much as she thought. And much that she did know she couldn't explain. What most impressed her was the fact that Harry didn't make the least hint of a pass at her. Every boy she knew would have felt that if left alone with a girl he must at least make a routine try-out. To prove his manhood: even if he didn't particularly expect or want to get anywhere with it. But Harry treated her exactly as he would if Bette had been at home, and seemed interested in her opinion on things.

Then Bette came in, with an armful of pamphlets, and embraced her and took over the cooking despite Harry's protests. The girls discussed Jeff and other dockers, and Maudie and Trix Mulready, and home-life as it worked out in the noisy mews. Bette said she was going to look for a job as soon as the crisis was over, probably an engineering job; and Phyl was torn between the desire to stay on at the docks and the desire to say she'd join Bette.

At last the meal of fried potatoes, onions, rissoles, with an apple-

pie to follow, was done; and no sooner had Harry started with the coffee than people began dropping in. Within half an hour there were seven visitors, and each time Phyl wondered where the new person was going to sit. A stool, an upended bucket and an orange-box were added to the one chair and the divan; and after that people sat on the floor. There was a fair man, half-bald, with a soft voice, Gerald; and a long thin girl with a dark square-cut fringe, Naomi; and a small dapper man with curly hair, in a brown jumper, James; and a sturdy round-faced girl with sticking-plaster on one finger, Molly; and a tall fair man whose legs were so long that they kept getting in everyone's way, Philip; and a man with a face like a rough wood-carving and a big pipe, David; and a very handsome dreamy girl in black satin, Alfrida. Then, when everyone was settled and Philip was saying, 'It's all in Blake, you know. Albion lays cold the White Rock,' there arrived a girl Jill, from Yorkshire, who was looking for David and had been sent to the news by someone in the pub round the corner. 'No, of course you must stay,' said Bette firmly and surrendered her corner of the divan, taking down Harry's heaviest books as a seat for herself.

David asked Jill how things were going in Yorkshire, and she said that in the mill where she worked there'd been a virtual lock-out. 'I came down to see my brother, who's in London, but I'm going back on Tuesday. We've heard a strong rumour that our boss, Swinton, is going to try a lot of victimisations, but we'll fight.'

'It's going on everywhere,' said Gerald. 'Victimisation, I mean. Take the lock-out of shipyard workers at Birkenhead. And all the government does is issue an appeal to employers to be nice Christian souls. Tips them off that no action will be taken.'

'Even the hotel managements now feel strong enough to hit back,' said Bette. 'Look at the victimisation of Piazza. The Savoy workers are going to strike again.'

'Yes, but will they win this time?' asked David. 'There you have all the difference between the upswing in October and the downswing now.'

'Swinton?' Harry was asking Jill. 'Has he got a son named Kit? I know him. How's he doing?'

'I'm afraid he's gone to the bad,' she replied.

Then, though Harry would have liked to go on talking about the Swintons, she and David exchanged reminiscences of the war years when they'd worked in the factory making precision instruments. Bomb blast and incendiaries had damaged and set the place on fire; but the workers had gone back again and again to rescue expensive instruments, with wood and brick falling all around. 'It could have been

like that once more,' he said. 'Only with a peace objective, not a war one. But it hasn't, and that's that.'

'You're going too far,' said James. 'Big gains have been made. In some places, like this mill of Jill's, the owners have beaten us to it, but in many others the workers have substantially taken charge these last few weeks. Can you possibly say their fighting morale won't be enormously raised? Of course it will. The fight's on a new level. The Cabinet's been exposed, and the workers have had a taste of what control of industry really means. They saved the country, and they know it.'

'That's it, that's it,' said Philip and got his legs tangled up with Bette's seat of books, so that the books slid over and Bette fell on top of David, and Philip in apologetic dismay butted into Molly, whose wrist-watch fell off. 'I tried to mend the strap with fuse-wire this morning,' she explained.

'You're far too optimistic,' said David. 'If you take the whole picture, the working-class has suffered a bad beating.'

'I don't see how you can say that,' demurred Harry. 'The developments during this last month have been far too involved and various. You can't generalise. At least not in that absolute way.'

'I may have spoken a bit too strongly,' said David, 'but what James said was so riddled with fallacies. He's looking for a spontaneous uprush, and he completely undervalues the resources of capitalism.'

'Is it the fallacy of spontaneity to have faith in the working-class?' demanded James.

'Yes, when it's blind faith.'

'Who's talking of blind faith? I'm talking of the concrete results of hard experience. Are you going to say the workers don't learn by experience?'

'When there's party guidance. Not otherwise.'

'Well, what's happened?' said Philip, settling against the wall. 'We all feel certain it's something important. But we disagree like mad as to what it was.'

'What we disagree about,' said Jill, 'is the lesson to be drawn. The general facts are hardly obscure. The crisis was just the crisis of British Capitalism, spotlighted by nature. The first question is what policy the government pursued? Was it socialist?'

General groans answered her. James said. 'That's obvious. What matters is the extent to which the vital forces of the Labour Movement have entrenched themselves for the next stage of the struggle.'

'No, it isn't,' said Jill. 'The question is what is happening to the State structure. The comrade was right who spoke of the strength of the enemy. We'll only fox ourselves if we undervalue it. In my opinion monopoly forms will emerge all the stronger.'

'Right-o,' said James. 'Then the struggle will be all the sharper.'
'We're back to the question of leadership,' said Harry. 'I take it that our opinion here depends on how we interpret and assess the Party Congress decisions. Have we found the right relationship to the Labour Movement, or have we gone up a blind alley?'

James and Philip loudly insisted that the right relation had been found, while David had his doubts, and Jill said that it wasn't necessarily a hundred per cent right, it would have to be interpreted and reapplied in terms of the post-crisis situation. 'I must say I feel the merging of Fabian Socialism and Imperialist Monopoly has gone a stage further. And it's no use saying the ordinary worker understands that.'

'Then we've failed to carry out our tasks effectively.'

'It isn't a matter of failure. It's a matter of clarifying just how far we've succeeded and how far we've yet got to go.'

Phyl was bewildered trying to follow the intricacies of the discussion. She seemed to understand it all while the words were flying about, but as soon as she tried to recall what was said, she found that nothing had left a clear mark. Some key-understanding was absent; and until she gained it, she'd go on being bewildered. What impressed her, most of all, was the way in which Jill, a stranger to all the others except David, had at once been accepted, had been addressed as Jill without anything but the smuggest of introductions, and had taken part in the argument without any difficulty. The key-understanding, which Phyl felt the lack of, was clearly at her disposal. It was like listening to a foreign language, which you knew to a certain extent, but not well enough to grasp meanings with the fullness of those who used it in their everyday-life.

But on second thoughts she felt that, remarkable as was the uniformity of ideas among these people, even more remarkable was the way in which they seemed to disagree all the while. Not one of them saw the fuel crisis and its events from exactly the same angle as the others; and yet they all had certain basic agreements which gave the discussion its point and force.

Now they had got on to the question of the U.S.A. and its vast production advances during the war—while Britain was still struggling to get back to 1939 levels. Would the fuel crisis work out as having advanced or checked the production drive? To the extent that it weakened it, Britain would be thrown more into the hands of the States, since the Cabinet would seize the excuse for calling on U.S.A. aid rather than carry out any socialisation of industry. Yes, but to the extent that our industry was strengthened, its owners would fight confidently to drive wages down and to link up with their fellow-members

in the U.S.A. as vassals or minor allies. Yes, but wouldn't it be more correct to say that if things weakened, the workers would be driven into greater militancy to maintain their gains? No, that's a fallacy. The fallacy of militancy-via-hardship. The argument went to and fro, coming to rest on the point: Everything depends on the leadership given, the extent to which the experience has been understood, the degree to which the production drive has been linked with that understanding. Everything seemed settled, when David started expressing doubts about the production drive itself.

'Your policy would isolate us from the workers,' said Harry.

'And yours, if you don't look out, will play into the hands of the right-wing social-democrats.'

'We've got to fight and explain on two fronts, save Britain by increased production, safeguard production by socialised forms.'

'It won't work that way,' persisted David. 'We're lagging behind events. We aren't relating national events to world events. And that's what we're always accusing the Labour Party of.'

'As long as the struggle for higher wages and better conditions goes on, how can the production drive be incorrect?'

'Because that's the economist fallacy. You're omitting the need to develop political consciousness.'

'It's the only way to develop it.'

'You're putting the cart before the horse.'

'You're forgetting the party. I'm not thinking of the workers and the party as distinct.'

'You're ignoring the Congress,' Joan put in. 'It showed clearly how to get the right relation to the Labour Movement in the situation created by the people's advances and the government's retreats.'

It went on and on, and Phyl lost track altogether of what was at stake. Then at last there was a break for coffee, and she found herself by Alfrida, who asked if she was an art student. 'No, I work in the docks,' said Phyl proudly, but wishing she could be an art student as well. 'Are you?'

'Yes,' said Alfrida. 'I'd like to paint you some time.'

'Me?' asked Phyl. 'I'd love it.' She hesitated. 'Could you understand what was said?'

'Not afterwards,' said Alfrida. 'And it's most unfortunate. I start off arguments at the Slade and think I can floor everyone; then I find I've forgotten all the main points.' Philip stumbled on her legs and apologised.

'Hallo,' he said to Phyl. 'We've met before, haven't we? No? Do you live round here?'

'She lives in the docks,' said Alfrida.

'I work there,' said Phyl, very pleased to find that she wasn't the only one who couldn't master the secrets of political analysis.

Molly came up, and Phyl found she was a conductress on a bus but wouldn't be much longer. She was being sacked next week, and the 3,500 clippies of London would all be thrown out in a couple of months. 'And to think of the weeks it took me to learn the hundred and six rules of a bus,' said Mollie with a rueful grin. Then Naomi, who worked in the post office, tried to rope Phyl in for some *Daily Worker* sales, and was disappointed to hear she didn't live in the area. 'Sorry, thought you were a new recruit, like Philip. We could do with a few in this branch.'

'Naomi's Lit. Sec.,' said Alfrida. 'She eats and drinks Lit., and sleeps with it.'

'Well, what was your view of the discussion?' asked Philip. 'You didn't say anything.'

Phyl felt as if she was present on false pretences, she wanted to explain, but said instead, 'Everyone seems to disagree.'

'No, we all agree!' began Philip seriously, but Naomi took him aside to discuss a street-meeting to be held next Thursday. Phyl looked round at the busy talkers, and felt both in and out of it all. And yet she was happy. It all seemed good and important even though she didn't know how it worked out.

She had a last-minute talk with Bette before they went to bed. 'He sounds nice,' said Bette about Jeff. 'Are you in love with him?'

'I don't know. Sometimes I think I am, sometimes I don't. I haven't really had a chance to find out yet.'

'Well, don't think you are if you aren't, because you're sorry for him,' Bette advised with the air of a woman who knew all about it. And Phyl thought of Maudie and her weekly mishaps. Bette went on with a sage nod, 'Your danger-point will be when he gets up. He'll be so glad to get back to things, he'll think you're a bit of heaven on earth, and you'll be wanting to help him. . .'

'Yes,' said Phyl uncertainly. She regarded Bette, and tried to remember her as she'd been six months before. She was the same Bette, but different; she'd grown up like one of those flowers in a slow-motion film that jerked open from bud to full blossom. She even looked plumper. If only Jeff was like Harry or Harry was like Jeff, I wouldn't have to think twice. She thought, I want someone as serious as Harry and as lively as Jeff.

Was anyone like that? she asked as she lay in the camp-bed Harry had rigged up by the window. There was only the one room to sleep in, but Bette had put the light out and they'd undressed in the dark. She

couldn't sleep, chasing some will-o'-the-wisp thought. She was happy; she felt at home; and yet she was somehow lost. She wanted to be part of the new life surrounding Harry and Bette; but she wasn't quite ready, couldn't quite leave the world of Pearl and Maudie and Trix Mulready. And yet steadily, she knew, what gave her a sense of safety was the existence of this other world, the world of Harry and Bette and the people arguing tonight.

At the other end of the room Harry was whispering something to Bette, and Bette smothered a little laugh. She loved them both, and was happy for them there on the divan, secure in their possession of one another. And she felt their union as something quite different from the strong yet somehow undefined relation of her father and mother, the snatches of broken love affairs that Pearl or Maudie indulged in, the intense but frustrated contacts of Mulready and a wife whom he couldn't properly possess, even the happy-go-lucky pleasure of Nell and Matt in one another. Everyone seemed afraid of facing some final point in their relations, everyone except Bette and Harry; and thinking over all this, she felt for the first time a deep longing for a complete union with another person, a longing that shook her from head to foot. For the first time it all seemed perfectly good and right and benign. And she thought: Oh, how much longer have I got to wait? Will I die first? And then she felt her resolution strengthen. I'll never give in, she thought. I know it will all come right in the end if I don't give in. I'll understand things like these others; I'll find someone I can really love; I'll be strong and good.

30

Lancashire

THEY HAD DOZED through most of the long film, a third-rate Western, but the cold night air revived them. He led her over to a pull-up joint for coffee. Only then did he rouse himself sufficiently to realise how subdued she'd been. 'You've got something on your mind?' he asked after a while.

'Oh well, Aunt Eadie's getting weaker every day . . . and Mr Lever next door came home from hospital with his broken leg yesterday.'

'No, it's not that.' He took her hand. 'Something about us?'

She stood pondering, biting her lips. 'I didn't mean to say anything, but that Alice of yours got hold of me last night down Queen Street and gave me a talking-to.'

'Alice is a gormless fool,' he began angrily.

'Not such a fool as all that. I told her I wasn't interested in your past, but I couldn't choke her off.'

'What did she say, blast her!'

'Only that Pat waited four years for you, while she had lots of chances; and when you came back, you just amused yourself, then got tired and threw her over. She said you'd always been like that with girls, and it was only fair to warn me.'

'I'll teach her to come butting in——' he said in a fury, half turning to go in search of her at once.

'If you do that, I'll never tell you another thing. I'm not going to be a trouble-maker, sec.'

'It was all a lie what she said. I was half-engaged to Pat, that's true, and I've always taken for granted you knew about it. But what happened was that Pat and I talked things over and decided we couldn't make a go of it.'

'That's enough, Dick. I don't want to hear another thing. I'm sorry I ever mentioned it. It's not my business, any way.'

'Of course it is.'

'Let's forget it. I'm sorry.'

'No, I don't want you thinking things. I'd rather have it all out now. Alice wanted me to marry Pat——'

'Please, Dick.' She laid her hand on his sleeve. 'I'd rather not hear any more.'

'And you don't believe what Alice said?'

'No, no, I don't.'

All the same, there was a constraint between them, and they said little during the walk to her home. They kissed, but in a rather aloof way.

Next day he had a chance to catch Alice alone. 'Look here,' he said, 'you can't help having a face like a baby's bottom'—from childhood that insult had always made her furious, though it wasn't as applicable now as when she'd been a pudgy little girl—but you can lay your tongue off my affairs, do you hear?'

'I don't understand,' she replied haughtily.

'Yes, you do. You leave Joan alone or I might say something to your Joseph about Wally Purdom.'

'Wally wasn't anything to me,' she declared, her face blotching with rage and fear. 'Never. He's a stinking liar.'

'If you didn't care for him, that makes it all the worse. And it's not anything he said; it's what I saw with my own eyes under the North Pier——'

'You shut up!' she screamed, and he decided he'd said enough. He

had had no intention of saying anything to Joseph, but he wanted to scare Alice a bit, only something that touched her plans had any lasting effect on her.

'All right, behave yourself. Otherwise I'll show him that snap of you in a bathing-suit at the age of ten. That'd put anyone off you for life, even a one-eyed monster like Joseph.'

She looked round for something to throw at him, and then rushed upstairs. He heard her tossing on her bed and giving smothered sobs

'Come in,' said Joan, opening the door. 'I didn't expect you to-night.' But he asked if it was all right, she said, 'Of course. Come in.'

He beat his hands together in front of the fire. Lucy looked up, leaving a big blot on a sheet of blue ruled letter-paper. 'She's writing a letter for me to Cousin Prue,' said Mrs Fitton. 'She's got a clear print-hand, and mine's no smoother than smithy smudge. How far have I got, Lucy girl?'

'Get Mr Withers the plumber to see to the burst pipe, or I won't pay for it,' read Lucy in a piping voice, with much difficulty, holding the sheet up towards the gas-jet. 'Because.'

'Cross out because. She knows why because. Just say I'm sorry the goat died on her.' Mrs Fitton smiled at Dick. 'Wait a moment and Lucy'll make some tea.' She nodded her head upstairs 'As for her, poor creature, the winter's so bad it's bending her down like a windle. Every now and then she sinks into a dead sleep and fair dies in the spell, if I didn't wake her up a bit. But nature will have her course, sure as a tup's a sheep.'

'Any more?' asked Lucy, who wrote with her tongue stuck out on one side of her mouth. 'Goat. Died on her.'

'Ah, what wits you have,' said her mother. 'You can't tell a bitter-bump from a gillhooter. Don't you know how to end a letter?' She explained in condescending tones. 'Hoping this finds you as it leaves me, your truly, Aunt in brackets Gertrude.'

'But what if you had toothache?'

'I haven't had it for two years, since I had my back tooth out.'

'But if you had it, would you still say hoping this finds you as it leaves me?'

'Nobody writes letters when they've got toothache,' said Mrs Fitton crushingly. 'Not unless they're certifiable. By goom, all this chatter of yours, it'd weary a growing tree.'

'Shall I go up and see how Aunt Eadie is?' asked Joan, who had been listening to some slight noises overhead.

'Aye, do, my girl, do. It harms my heart when I think how she used

to be as limber as a trout, and now she's as wambly and slump as a barrow full of warp-sizing.' Then, after Joan had left the room, she added to Dick in a loud whisper. 'She's got a kind heart, our Joan has, she takes after her poor mother. And she's no fool neither. There's more on her head than a small-tooth comb can fetch out. Not like Lil next door; if she finds herself home by accident for half an hour in the evening, she turns on the jazz and croons to it all the while, else she'd be lonesome.' She nodded in agreement with herself. 'Aye, and I must say that blue blouse favours her to a wrinkle, though I made it myself.'

'How do you spell brackets?' asked Lucy.

'Heaven help us! You don't spell it, you put it like two ear-flaps round the word, just to show it's a kind of whispering on paper. To think that such a witless child is going to be mistress of three houses in Oldham as soon as Eadie decides to go off and meet her Maker. Trying to tell you anything is worse than mucking with sand and draining with cinders.'

Dick showed Lucy how to make the brackets, while she gratefully leaned on his shoulder. 'Oh, them,' she said as if disappointed.

'Now, make the tea,' said Mrs Fitton, taking up her sewing again. She hummed a tune, and then recited, 'Old Mother Twitchett has but one eye, and a long tail which she makes fly, and every time she goes over a gap, she leaves a piece of her tail in a trap.'

'I know what that is,' said Lucy in superior tones. 'That's needle and thread.' She looked at Dick. 'I bet you didn't guess, did you?'

Joan came down again. 'She seems resting quite well.'

'Now sit you down and tell Lucy and me all about the picture you saw last night,' said Mrs Fitton. 'I'd sooner hear the story, as long as nothing's left out, than go and sit in one of those stuffy places and bring home somebody else's fleas.'

Joan went to see Dick off at the door. She slipped outside and he took her in his arms. 'Thanks for coming,' she said.

'I want to ask you something.' He kissed her hair and said in a stifled voice. 'When are we going to get married?'

'You've got to ask me first.' She moved closer.

'Well, you can consider yourself asked.'

'You can consider yourself accepted.'

'Good old Joan.'

They clung together in a long breathless embrace. 'You haven't said you love me yet,' she murmured at the end.

It was hard to say, though he felt it in every fibre of his being; but he said it. 'I love you. . . .'

'I love you too. . . .'

He wanted to get alone with Mike and tell him about Joan; they were sitting in the canteen over cups of tea, and nobody was to shift. There was heavy rain and wind outside. Old Andy, nouncing the canteen food, had rambled on to an account of the dinners at Christmas in the old days. 'The plum-pudding come on table in thunner and lightning—'

'There wasn't no storm at Christmas,' said Darkie.

'He means the brandy-blaze, ignorant,' said Mike. 'And not Christmas. Christmas a hundred years ago.'

'Aye,' said Old Andy, taking the clay-pipe from his mouth lifting its tin lid, 'Aye, and it nearly swelt a chap's eyebrows off looking at it. That were the sort for shifting your ribs and making take your wind thick.'

'Naw, I don't care for clubs,' said Darkie. 'I almost joined the B once, but I didn't, and I don't feel I missed much in life.'

Mike looked over Frank's shoulder at the newspaper. 'Any news there about the heroes we are?' He had meant to make a joke, but a note of bitterness crept into his voice. Somehow the deep drive energy that had filled the pit throughout February had gone rather.

'No, but a lot about victimisation. Chairman of Austin Motors defined the National Unity born of a common struggle against crisis by attacking shop-stewards. Isaacs mildly deprecates the victimisations and says it'd be a nicer world if they didn't happen. That lets the bosses know they're safe.'

'And so what?' Dick asked.

'We saved England, and we've taken a bash and the bosses feel strong enough to come back with combing out our leaders.'

'I don't think that's all there is to it,' said Dick.

Frank laughed and gave one of his cheery grins. 'You're right, I was just being carried away by bitterness for the moment. But it's no answer. All the same, we've got to realise that from now on the struggle will get sharper. If the government had really called on people to meet the crisis, what a terrific burst of energy, what a relief of socialist forces there'd have been. It's the showdown. They take the capitalist way out. From now on they'll be a hundredfold more dependent on the monopolies. And that must work out as depends on the U.S.A. and a surrender to the anti-Soviet forces. Look out a steady stepping-up of anti-Soviet propaganda in all the papers on the air.'

'I'm not so sure,' said Dick, looking at Mike.

'I dunno quite,' said Mike. 'Frank may be putting it too simply, I'm afraid he is right in the main.'

'What about Shinwell?' Dick began.

'I'll lay you ten to one that Shinwell's sacrificed,' said Frank, 'that he takes it without a murmur.'

'No, whatever you say about some of the others, Shinwell' proper working-class leader,' Dick objected.

'You wait and see.'

Darkie had noticed a sheet of paper pinned on the wall, he w over and brought it back. 'Listen to this,' he said. 'This is better s than all your politics' He read out the poem:

*'Now this is the song of our Colliery
And its part in the Fuel Crisis—
When the people of Britain looked to the miners
And the boss-class looked to prices*

*'Old William sat by his leaky pumps
And slew a beetle per day
He needs a leather-seat to his pants
Or his pants they rot away*

*'One day he was reaching for a ledge
And fell with a splash in the pool.
The stink rose up like the devil's fart
But the water made him cool*

*'His missus put a peg on her nose
To shut out the brimstone smell
"I knew you went down the pit, daddy,
But not that you'd got to hell"*

*'He cried, "I'd have steered another course
If I had known what was coming,
I'd have taken the thousand pound at Blackpool
And married the Bearded Woman"*

*'Then he turned the water yet stinkier
With a trick that's hard to beat;
He took off his boots and he took off his socks
And he washed in the pool his feet.*

*'And then to help the export-drive
And restore our trading losses,
As tear-gas for strikers he bottled the stuff
For sale to the Yankee bosses.*

*'And so when the British people no more
By capitalists are bossed,
They'll tell how our William saved the land
In the days of the Great Frost.'*

Each stanza was greeted with shouts of laughter; and at the end Darkie set himself to draw a sketch of old William the pumps-man at the bottom of the poem. 'Who wrote it?' asked Frank.

'I bet Mike did,' said Dick.

'Well, you never know,' said Mike. 'I may have made some of it up in a dream. Things like that aren't written. They grow.'

'What do you think of this?' asked Darkie.

The sketch was crude, but immediately recognisable as William squatting by his beloved pumps.

Andy was waiting for the commotion to die down and let him get back to the Christmas dinner. 'Ah, and we had the right stuff to drink.' He slopped his tea into his saucer and blew on it. 'None of your brewed besoms, but gradely stungo. A quart of it on top of a beef-steak would make a chap feel do some, I can tell you. It's what I call milk o' paradise, or nature's pap. You can suck it till you're blind, and never have enough. Ah, you've missed a lot, young man,' he added to Dick.

'Maybe we get back on the swings what we lose on the roundabouts,' Dick answered.

Andy, with his great bony hands resting on the knees of his worn blue serge suit, shook his head sadly; but Darkie turned to him, 'Was it special brewed? I once heard of a pub in Mafeking Street where the landlord kept a barrel of bitter for six months by mistake, and one day he drew a gill for a stranger, and the man says: 'What's this? It tastes like wine, he says. But it was just beer from the small brewery out Ocley way.'

'I had a word with Mr Henderson before I came in,' said Dick to Mike. 'I'm going on that course in a fortnight.'

Frank nodded. 'Good, some day we'll really take the mines over and not all the creeping Crippses in the world will stop us.' He rose to go, but paused with his foot on the bench. 'There's been such bad times in Lancashire, the folk'll swallow anything almost, as long as there's jobs going in pit and mull. But they're in for some bad shocks. What a hell of a pity it is.'

'You're a communist,' said Andy, annoyed at the continual interruptions. 'You go off to Moscow and ask 'em for stingo and Christmas pudding. Then you'll begin to wake up. Lancashire can look after herself without your help. You're so clever you can't see the nose in

front of your own face. You're just stupid, that's what's wrong with you, you're just stupid.'

'I'm as Lancashire as yourself,' said Frank good-humouredly, 'even if I was born in Manchester.'

'Come on, Andy, tell us some more about that beer,' said Darkie.

I'll tell Mike after, Dick thought, and sat back, listening happily. In a way he agreed with both Andy and Frank. It's too soon to make up your mind on exactly what was happening, he thought, but that doesn't mean a chap can't make out where he stands. And he thought of Joan with a tenderness that left his body tingling.

'What are you smiling at, young 'un?' asked Andy. He shook his head amiably. 'Ah, we're only young once, and maybe it's just as well. I did some ridiculous things myself when I was young, things that don't bear thinking on. So I don't want to be hard on you, young Dick. You can smile away till you split your cheeks, but you still got to do a day's work to earn a day's wages, and apples don't grow on monkey-trees.'

End-piece

'WELL, HERE WE are again,' cried Harry, coming up behind Dick, who had entered the bar and stood looking uncertainly round. He clapped him on the back.

'Hallo,' said Dick, and let himself be drawn over to the bar-counter. Oddly, he hadn't recognised Harry at once. When you'd only known a chap in khaki, and when you hadn't seen him, anyway, for a couple of years, he seemed different. Or was there more to it than that?

Harry was talking on. 'Not exactly spring weather yet, but the hellish nip has gone. I was up in Leeds last week, but I couldn't get hold of Kit Swinton. Not that I was altogether surprised. I'd heard he was going rather to the bad. He went into his father's mill, and that got him down.'

'He used to say nothing'd get him there,' said Dick, feeling more at home. 'What'll you have?'

'I've already caught her eye,' said Harry, winking at the barmaid. 'And you needn't tell me what I know it's bitter.'

'We all drank bitter.'

They took their glasses over to a table under the front window. 'I met him in London last October,' Harry resumed, 'and he was shifty, not at all pleased at meeting me.' He grinned. 'I was on picket-duty at the Savoy.'

'What were you doing there?'

'Oh, there were students and people from the Civil Servants helping the strikers to get a bit of sleep.' He looked at Dick with curiosity. 'But what about you? Can't say you look much changed. Not quite so tanned, that's all.'

'About the only thing a coal-mine doesn't do to you,' observed Dick.

'How do you like going back to the pit?'

'It's what I'm used to, and all my friends are there,' said Dick evasively. 'It's all right, and we've got a good manager.'

'I'm glad you could come to Manchester. I wrote on the off-chance—'

'It just happened to suit. I'm going off next week on a course, and Joan and me had been talking about coming up for the Saturday.'

'Who's Joan? Where is she?'

'She'll be along in a few minutes. I left her doing a bit of shopping in Marks and Spencers.' He finished his beer and stood up. 'Gimme your glass. We're going to get married in June.'

'Good on you,' said Harry, but Dick was hurrying to the bar, flushing.

When he came back with the beers, Harry had just taken a letter from his pocket. 'I'd like you to see this, to round things off. You know, when I wrote you that letter, I wrote to Kit as well, and then I thought I'd do things properly and write to that sister of Gavin's, who lived in Newcastle. So I did. I thought the letter must have gone astray, then last week I got an answer. It's an odd letter, but you can see she's the right sort of person—just the sort you'd expect to be Gavin's sister.'

Dick took the letter and began reading it. The writing was sharp but clear.

Dear Harry Manson, I ought to have answered you weeks ago, but life hasn't been too easy. In fact it's gone up in smoke, my own life I mean. And I'm trying to start all over again. Perhaps you'll find it strange that I unbosom myself to you, but I can't help feeling you like an old friend. And that letter of yours played its part in bringing things to a head. It made Gavin come to life again, and that helped to make me realise I'd been living the wrong sort of way. I know what he'd have said if he'd been there, and your letter was like his voice, it made me stand outside myself and take a reckoning.

Well, I won't try to tell you the details, and it wasn't anything so interesting as all that. But I'd just slumped away into an easy sort of putting up with things, and to break with things I had to break with someone who had been very dear to me. That's not easy, particularly when you keep telling yourself you're half to blame for not having been more loving and for not taking the stand you know you ought to have, long back.

I'm still in Newcastle. You'll see the changed address. If ever you're up this way, let me know and we'll have a good talk. I've come slap bang into the world again, and I'm tied up in a hundred things, but they're the kind that'd interest you, I think. So please don't forget.

Yours fraternally,
Jean Mackenzie.

Dick considered the letter, 'Ah, well,' he said, 'she seems a good sort. I'm sorry she's been in a bit of a jam.'

'Let's hear some more about yourself,' said Harry, folding up the letter carefully, 'and how people are taking things in your part of the world.'

'They take things pretty calmly in Lancashire,' said Dick with a smile. 'We're ticking over.'

'So you're back in the mines, going on a course, and soon to be married. Set for life? Myself, I'll complete my law course this year, and I'll probably get married, too. Looks as if our futures are marked out for us, eh?'

'More or less,' said Dick cautiously, not clear what Harry was getting at.

'I don't know how you feel, but I feel it's impossible to plan anything for more than a few months in this mad world of ours. I feel in my bones I'll never keep on with the law; but now I've gone so far, I may as well finish the course.'

'The pits can't very well fold up,' said Dick, implying that whatever the prospects for the law, the pits were in a reasonably eternal position. 'That's one of the reasons I went back.'

'What's your views of the Fuel Crisis and the Frost?' asked Harry. 'Politically, I mean.'

'Well, we could have got through worse,' said Dick. 'I know what some of our chaps say. They say the government let us down all along the line; but I'm ready to wait and see a bit more before I go as far as all that.'

'In my view it's been a fundamental betrayal of the British people,' Harry began earnestly, 'and you'll see the results piling up from now on.' But he noticed that Dick wasn't listening.

'There's Joan,' said Dick, and waved.

Joan came over, smiling her frank easy smile, and Harry jumped to his feet, pressed her hand, and found her a seat, talking all the while. Then he ran over to buy her a cider. Dick smiled at her, and she smiled back. His smile said that Harry was a good chap, but very excitable and talkative; and her smile said that she agreed, that she was quite ready to like Harry, but that she was glad Dick was Dick and nobody else under the sun. Then Harry came back with the cider, and they began chatting about war memories of the lighter sort and Joan's aunt and Mr Henderson's hopes for the pit and the problems of finding somewhere to live; and Harry didn't manage to get round to politics again. Gradually Dick found himself liking Harry again as much as he'd liked him in the army; he couldn't help feeling a certain affectionate superiority towards him, even while admitting his intellectual virtues.

Then suddenly Harry noticed the clock and started up, exclaiming

that he'd have to run if he was going to catch the Liverpool train and get to his uncle's place on time.

'Now that we've managed to meet again, let's keep in touch,' he said enthusiastically, talking twice as fast in his haste. 'I'm afraid we must count Kit a wash-out; but I'll write again to Jean, and you and I mustn't let things lapse. To tell you the truth, I've a mind to go into documentary films as soon as I'm a lawyer. Don't try to make sense of it, but somehow I can't see myself sitting down. I want to get out over Europe and see things for myself. You can't trust our press now for anything but its crime reporting. I want to learn how you get on in the pit, Dick. Perhaps you'll ask me up for a few days when you've got a house, if you ever get it, and you and Joan must stay with us in London. I've a feeling that big things are going to happen soon, for good and for bad. We've just come through a turning-point. Now we're bang into the post-war struggle, and the enemies of man will let themselves go, you'll see, bloodier and bloodier.'

'I don't know,' Dick began, but Harry whirled on.

'The whole crisis was confused—seemed working up to a climax and then went flat, eh? That's the whole point. The drama lies in the way the people have been let down. You'd think nothing has come out of it, but that's not so. Hell's come out of it. The capitalist system on the full rampage again, with infinitely increased powers of destruction and of fooling people. That means a new large-scale drive to war and an effort to blame everything on the Soviet Union. Okay, we'll beat 'em to it. Dick, we've got to keep awake, we've got to watch things, and be ready. Otherwise we're all done for. Oh, I really must run now.' He shook farewell-hands a second time. 'Give Joan a good kiss for me.' And rushed out, dodging back for a forgotten suitcase, laughing, almost falling over someone's feet, and getting away at last.

'He always did take your breath away a bit,' said Dick, more shaken than he liked to admit by Harry's passionate finale. 'But he's a good chap. He makes you feel it's worth while being alive.'

'Don't you feel it otherwise?' asked Joan.

'Need you ask?' He felt his perturbation dying down as he looked into Joan's calm eyes. 'Now, what have you been buying?' And as she opened a rustling bag of brown paper, he felt a surge of happiness once more, compounded obscurely of the music and fireworks of New Year's Eve, of Romeo's words and Joan's warm presence, of the army memories evoked by Harry and the rediscovered comradeship of the pit . . . and something more, for which he had no words and which Harry's bustling passage across their Manchester afternoon had brought out, a sense of confidence, of opening horizons, of great movements

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